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BLACK CAT

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CLEVER SHORT STORIES

The Black Cat

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Contents

The Man Who Learned to Kill	*R. Y. Gilbert*	3
Dorner and the Deacons	*Ramsey Benson*	12
Sail and Wassail	*Edwin Dial Torgerson*	18
The Serpent Bowl	*Mary D. Fowler*	23
A Philistine in Arcady	*Elliot Field*	29
On the Berry Bush	*Anna Brownell Dunaway*	37
The Black Cat Club		43

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THE MAN WHO LEARNED TO KILL

By R. Y. GILBERT

The guest of honor sometimes will bear watching. He may not have an eye for the family plate, but if he has come a long journey without companionship, he may be reluctant to depart without something to revive the human interest.

THE guest of honor sat on the silk carpet of honor in a great felt tent of the Mongol pattern, and longed for anything but more honor. His long yellow hair hung in his eyes, which were dewy with much yawning, and his well booted legs were stretched as far as the fire and the kettle that occupied the center of the tent would allow. During the last three hours he had received and endeavored to entertain every male citizen of Tal. They came singly and in groups, squatted in respectful semi-circles before him, wished him peace, and then proceeded to ask questions. These good Turki certainly could not be accused of a lack of intellectual curiosity, the guest ruminated, for they had inquired about everything connected with his personal past and future, had inspected his traveling outfit with more minuteness than a Russian border customs officer. In the brief interims between calls he had counted the poles which supported the dome of the tent from three different starting points, but always with the same results. They were seventy-two, no more and no less. Then he had taken a complete inventory of the furniture of this semi-portable structure. He knew that there were thirty-two bowls on the shelves to the right of the entrance, three saddles, two whips and one bridle to the left, three Russian boxes, all tin and tinsel, beside the China shelves.

Ivan Seranasloff was not a great person, but he was the guest of honor in Tal and in accord with the primordial traditions of Turkestan he was hedged with a monarch's dignity. He had ridden into the tent and shack settlement in the mountains at high noon and the lords of the village had promptly taken charge of him, horse and baggage. The Dorgha and Metsup were more than pained because they could not entertain him personally. In the former's house a daughter was giving birth, in the latter's tent there were already eight guests assembled in anticipation of an imminent wedding. The honor of entertaining the foreign visitor therefore devolved upon the Unbashi, he being next in rank. That he happened to be away for the day concerned no one. His khatun was at home and she could pour tea and ask after the health of the stranger's family as well in her lord's absence as in his presence. Ivan was accordingly installed in the Unbashi's tent, a man was detailed to lead his horse about, two patriarchs were posted at the door to quide, protect, and entertain the sacred guest if he ventured forth, and a small boy was stationed at a seemly distance to stone the dogs in case they were inhospitable enough to bark.

In his state of boredom Ivan longed for one of two alternatives: either that the patriarchs at the tent door would desert their post and give him an opportunity to get out for a quiet stroll about the place, or that the black-eyed young person in the flowered cap, who poured his tea, would look the other way and give him a fair chance to inspect her. He formulated in his mind several possible themes for conversation, but upon consideration none of them seemed suitable in Tal. He told himself it would have been vastly different, had he been closeted with a woman in Kazan, Moscow, Berlin or Paris, for he knew what women liked to talk about; and at once he knew he was lying to himself, for his experience in European salons,

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in Siberian Tartar settlements and in Mongol camps told him more truly that women do not need themes for conversation, but once started talk much the same the world over, themelessly, joyfully, and endlessly. Emboldened by this latter thought he finally asked:

"When do you think the Unbashi will return, Ayla? Has he gone far?"

"Not far," she replied. "He went this morning to Chincheng, a city of the Kitai, to buy tea, tobacco and sweets. He will certainly be back before the sun sets. If Tereh had come a little earlier he might have gone with the Unbashi. It is a short ride and now that the snow is on the hills it is very pretty. Here Tereh finds it very lonely and dull."

After this little speech she flashed a dazzling smile in his direction, and Ivan was certain that he had never seen brighter eyes, finer teeth or more fascinating dimples. He fairly sputtered in his attempt to assure her that he was not lonely and that he found Tal anything but dull. Unbashi's khatun meanwhile busied herself by making a great steam rise from the pot, which clouded her face and left nothing visible but the long locks that hung down in front of her ears, the long plait down in front of her ears, the long plait that surmounted this simple coiffure. Ivan had never liked those long locks in front of the ears before, but he realized now that they were a perfect frame for perfect dimples. She listened patiently to his protests, then re-covered her pot and sat back on her heels.

"Ah, Tereh, but it *is* dull here," and there was a note of serious conviction in her voice. "And it is stupid, too. I was listening while you talked to the Dorgha, who thinks he knows everything. You people of the West are wise and we are stupid. The Dorgha knows nothing, none of our men do. They talk of their horses and camels and sheep, they eat and sleep, and are satisfied. The men know nothing and the women—" She did not finish, but opened the pot and set free another vast cloud of steam.

"What of the women, Ayla?" he asked.

"The women!" she exclaimed with a bitterness that surprised him. "What can they know? They are one with the horses, camels and sheep. If they work well and are fruitful they are kept and fed. The woman who grows tired or is barren—she is for sale. Is it so in your land?"

Ivan, familiar with the East as he was, was considerably surprised by this display of spirit and rebellion. He confessed that conditions were not quite the same in his country.

"Then what are your women like?" she demanded. "What does an Unbashi's wife do in Russia?"

"An Unbashi's wife in Russia," he mused, trying to grasp the relative social status of such a person in the Occident. "In Russia an Unbashi's wife would not live in a tent. She would live in a big house of stone, with many, many rooms, all carpeted and furnished with shiny chairs and tables. She would eat with her husband and children from silver and very beautiful china; she would have three or four servants, to cook and dust and open the door when she went out. She would read a great deal and go visiting a great deal and when she went out she would ride in a handsomer carriage than that of the Padushah in Kumul."

"And if she displeased her husband, he would still beat her or divorce her?" she inquired.

"He would not be likely to do either. He might get in trouble if he beat her, and it is very troublesome indeed, divorcing wives in Europe. One can get a divorce in Europe, but it is as likely to be the woman who divorces the man as the man who divorces the woman. In any case it is very troublesome and difficult."

The Unbashi's wife laid down her ladle, poured two cups of tea, one for herself and one for her guest, which she placed on a little table before him and settled down to a determined cross-examination. For an hour she questioned and he lectured upon the Occident and its institutions. By devious explanation he made vivid the glories of Moscow, Petersburg and Paris, and he wondered at the avidity with which she inquired into the details of cafe, boulevard, university and studio life in the Far

West. This little daughter of the hills gained a mental insight into the West in an hour's keen and judicious questioning that would not have come to the average Turki woman of Ivan's acquaintance in a year, or ten years. He could not help thinking what a sensation those black eyes and that lithe figure would make in certain Parisian circles, if she were transplanted to the West and redecked in the latest Parisian modes.

"You should go to Paris, Ayla; you're dead and buried here," he told her.

For reply a hard glint came into her eyes, which melted almost instantly into a smile as she enveloped herself once more in a cloud of steam.

Ivan had meant to spend the night in Tal and ride on the next day to a settlement on the south slope of the hills and hence to Kumul, or Hami as the Chinese call it, but he suddenly determined at this juncture in the conversation that both he and his horse would be the better for a day's rest or even two days in Tal. The village officials would be flattered; however the Unbashi might take it he would be gracious and express pleasure; and the Unbashi's wife—he did not admit to himself that she was the root of his determination; he preferred to believe that he needed a rest, for Ivan was still young and in the habit of making apologies to Ivan.

Before he had an opportunity to re-open the conversation there was a clatter of hoofs at the door, a bustle among the patriarchs, and a second later the Unbashi himself dived into the tent, stood his long rifle against the stack of saddles, and came forward smiling and with outstretched hands to welcome his guest. Ivan leaped to his feet and stood towering above his host, a blond Adonis above a swart and bulky gnome. The Unbashi was a stunted, one-eyed man, knotty with muscles, grizzly with age, and incomparably ugly, but with more force and vitality in his squat body and hard face at fifty than ninety-nine youngsters out of a hundred at twenty.

"My house is disgraced!" he shouted as he urged Ivan to sit down, and then dropped down beside him. "The Tereh comes and finds no one here to receive him but a woman. The place is dirty and all out of order, the tea is mere wash, and there's not a decent piece of bread in the tent. I hope Tereh will not think too harshly of us for proffering such miserable hospitality."

Ivan was familiar with this sort of deprecation on the host's part, and knew the reply that was expected, so he plunged into a fluent eulogy of everything in the tent and about it. The Unbashi's wife was pouring more tea and piling a mountain of fresh, flat loaves on a platter; but the Unbashi, not to be balked by her thoughtfulness, interrupted his conversation with Ivan to bellow for tea, and added to his guest: "This woman is the laziest and most worthless in Tal, and the best used at that. I've had five of them, so I ought to know how to train them, but this one is no good."

He might, indeed, have been passing remarks upon his sheep, and Ivan, accustomed to this fashion in speech, looked out of the corner of his eye to note the effect upon the black-eyed one. He saw her fingers tighten viciously upon the handle of the tea jug, but her face was impassive, dull and expressionless, as a Turki woman's face usually is.

In a moment he had led the Unbashi to talk of horses and sheep, and tactfully showed such an interest in stock that he was shortly escorted out to the sheds and pens to be lectured upon the merits and shortcomings of every four-legged creature in Tal. They returned to the tent just as the last streak of daylight disappeared from the western horizon and at once set about the consumption of a steaming pile of boiled mutton and huge bowls of dough strings floating in mutton broth. When the Unbashi had made certain that his guest was well started upon the fattest and tenderest selection from the mutton, he set upon a similar chunk with a vigor that soon reduced it to a whitened bone. This he skillfully cracked with the handle of his big knife; he sucked out the marrow and threw the fragments into the fire. Ivan knew better than to try to stop or to carry on a conversation. He did his duty to the mutton, and said nothing until the platter was clean and his host was oiling

his top boots with the grease on his fingers. Immediately after, visitors began to arrive; his traveling kit was once more overhauled, and then they sat and smoked, talked occasionally, and sang at times, until the last guest had yawned his way out of the tent and the fire had burned to cinders. Then the Unbashi suggested sleep. No elaborate preparations were made. A few rugs, quilts and sheepskins were pulled about. Ivan rolled up in his, the Unbashi rolled up in his, and a few minutes later his wife arranged her rugs by the fire and rolled up in the same fashion.

Two hours later the Russian still lay awake, watching the stars through the round aperture in the roof of the tent. Unbashi slept heavily and whistled a lugubrious basso through his nose. Ivan turned over and made a serious attempt to get away from his thoughts, but an hour later he was sitting up by the fire smoking a cigarette and thinking. He thought of home, a trifle sadly and bitterly perhaps; of Moscow and the theaters of Paris and the cafes; but however far his mind wandered it always came back to Tal and centered itself with great persistence upon the person of Mrs. Unbashi, the black-eyed, the recalcitrant fifth wife of a one-eyed Turkish ogre who talked of her and his camels in one and the same breath and tone. As he stared into the cinders he pictured her with her long side locks, her brilliant eyes, her perfect teeth and provoking, tantalizing dimples. He saw the same bright face above a black evening gown, a riding habit, a bathing suit; above every device of the Occidental tailor, in fact; and there was never anything grotesque or incongruous in the picture. Then he looked up from the cinders and there was no need to visualize, for there on the opposite side of the red glow was the Unbashi's wife, sitting up in her rugs and robes, her cheeks aflame with the red glow, and her eyes doubly bright in the reflection from the embers. She signaled for a cigarette, which he passed across to her. She blew clouds of smoke towards the hole in the roof, then, listening intently to the Unbashi's breathing, she leaned forward, satisfied, and whispered:

"Tereh cannot sleep. Of what are you thinking?"

"Of home, partly," he replied, and then, rashly, as he thought at once, "but chiefly of you."

She dropped her eyes, but as he watched her face he saw the telltale dimples materialize until her lips parted in a smile. Emboldened, he continued:

"And of what was Ayla thinking?"

"Of the great West," she replied, still looking down, "of Paris, too, and all the wonderful things you talk of, but chiefly of you."

Ivan's heart fluttered and he exhaled much smoke to conceal his youthful embarrassment, but she continued before he could reply:

"You have told me much about your country and other countries, and about your customs and the way you make love and marry as you choose; now I wish you would tell me something about yourself. Be very soft, for the Unbashi may have a dream and wake."

"There is not much to tell about me, and what there is, is not at all pleasant. If it were all good I should not be here," said he, hesitating between the phrases, and wondering whether he would not be extremely silly to tell his story to this inquisitive little woman. News travels with marvelous rapidity in the Orient, and he could not afford to have his news travel. But like most men he was pleased with the prospect of talking of himself to a woman who was interested, so he ran through his history briefly.

"I was born," he began, "in Kazan. My father was a wealthy merchant, a Bai, as you say, but he let me run about much as I pleased, and I learned a great deal about your people there—learned to speak Turkish, in fact, and to read it a little. When I was fourteen we moved to Moscow, for my father had business in many places and decided that he could attend to all his interests better in a big city. I went through the schools, into the University and out of it, into the army and out of that; and then, as there was little business and less work in my makeup, my father got me back into the army as a lieutenant,

a kind of Unbashi, you know. It was an idle, easy life in those days, with long leaves in Berlin and Paris. I wanted to be a novelist or an artist or something of the sort, so I mixed with the people who write and paint and tried my hand at everything. I was enjoying myself, thinking of anything but war when the war came. Perhaps you know that Russia and Japan had a very big war in the Three Eastern Provinces as the Chinese call it. We call it Manchuria. Well, I had to go. I hated the thought of it from the start. I never saw a sheep killed and never wanted to, and after I got into the fight and had a chance to kill men I could not do it. I don't think I was ever afraid, and I can imagine that I might kill a man for a big reason, but I had nothing against those little yellow people and I couldn't shoot them. When they came on I yelled 'Fire!' to the men and shot my revolver into the air. I am sure I never hit anyone, and I never used my sword. It was hot at times, and how I escaped getting killed I do not know. Some people get used to blood and dead men, but I do not. Of course people noticed this. I was called before the higher officers and asked for an explanation. I told them clearly that I could not kill. They said that was a soldier's business, and that I was to display no more nonsense in field or camp. That night I ran away. It was not from the enemy, but from the blood and stench of blood, and I have been running ever since. It's more than a year, now, since I crossed into Mongolia. I've been with the Mongols ever since, learning a lot about their country that the Russians might like to know, but, you see, I dare not go back to Russia, and I dare not meet a Russian. That's all, Ayla, and now you know how I came here and why I'm here. Unbashi has not turned over during this whole story, so I'm going to ask you something. Where are you from? And how did you happen to marry him?"

"Marry him!" she hissed, her black eyes flashing. "I didn't marry him, he married me. I was bought like his goats. I was born in Kuchar. My mother died, and my father was a kamabaz, a gambler and a hashish smoker. When the Chinese came he learned to smoke opium and we became beggars. We lived in a beggar's inn and every day I had to dress in rags and lead my father, who pretended to be blind, about the streets screaming, "Allah, Allah, Allah!" My father was too lazy to learn the long prayers that the other beggars said when they stopped before a shop, and I never had a chance. Then the Unbashi came. He was a Hadji, returning from his second pilgrimage to Mecca. He learned in Kashgar that his fourth wife was dead, and, as Kuchar has a reputation for beautiful girls, he stopped there to buy a wife. I was fifteen then, dirty and shabby, and my father sold me for ten taels and a catty of hashish. The Unbashi was too mean to buy a girl from a good family, and he has hated me from the day he took me away from Kuchar; but he's afraid of me, for he does not want the Tal-lik to know that I am a beggar's daughter, a scavenger. I have been in Tal four years, and we have not been very happy. I have had no children, you see; and besides, I am not like other women, he tells me."

Ivan thought this story more pathetic and more sordid than his own. If he had been very near loving her before, he pitied her now, which is even more dangerous. He could not trust himself to look up, so he sat a long while silently shredding the butt of a cigarette. At last the little whisper came across the fire to him again.

"I have made Tereh sad," she said. "You have a big heart and you pity me, is it not so? The Turki would not pity me. They would say that I was a lucky girl, the daughter of a kamabaz, and a kalander, the wife of an Unbashi, and ungrateful. But you are different, for you are from the West, where women are not sold for an ingot of silver and a lump of hashish. You are thinking how much happier I should have been in your country, where one is free to love. Is it not so, Tereh?"

"You have read my thoughts, Ayla," he replied with a smile. "Truly your wisdom is not of Tal."

"And now tell me," she continued, after another long pause, "where are you going

and what are you going to do? You cannot go back to Russia you say."

"No," he replied rather sadly, "I cannot go back. So I suppose I shall push on and come to Paris some day, where I shall be like the Ahunjan of your songs. I shall hop from the branches into the garden, and from the garden into the branches, lead an aimless sort of life, draw pictures sometimes, write a little sometimes, and let Russia forget me.... Would you like to come with me, Ayla?" he continued, affecting a smile and a light, bantering tone as he looked across the fire. But the face that he saw there startled him into sobriety. Her cheeks were drawn, and her eyes stared like one who sees apparitions; but she was not looking past him, she was staring at him. She was facing temptation and terror. She had not heard the affectation of flippancy in his tone, she had heard only his words. Crawling out of her rugs and quilts she lay beside the Unbashi a moment and listened to his breathing; then, with the stealth of a cat and something so melodramatic in her expression that it might have produced a smile on Ivan's face had he been a disinterested spectator, she crept up to him and with her face almost to his, whispered: "Take me with you, Tereh."

But there was nothing sensational or melodramatic about Ivan. He studied her a moment with his heavy brows knit, then put his left arm about her supple shoulders, took her face in his great right hand and kissed her. Her body quivered under his arm and when he raised his head and turned her face to the embers her eyes were closed and the shadowiest of dimples foretokened a smile. Then this big lieutenant of Cossacks, who could not kill an enemy in the heat of battle, who was running across Asia to escape the smell of blood, felt that he could kill, yes, wash his hands in blood—for her!

"It is settled, Ayla," he whispered, raising her gently. "We go together."

"Yes," she whispered, suddenly coming back to her practical self and sitting bolt upright. "But we must wait, and be very clever and very careful. The Unbashi sleeps soundly, but he is jealous and watchful when he is awake. When the time comes I shall tell you. I shall know the time, you will know the roads, and I follow. Now we must sleep. Pleasant dreams, Adash."

During the next two days and evenings, which were just like all others in Tal, Mrs. Unbashi was so cool, cautious and restrained in her dealings with Ivan Seranasloff that the Unbashi formulated no suspicions whatever, and the Russian himself wondered if that official's wife had not begun to regard their midnight conspiracy as a wild dream or an indiscreet flirtation which it was her duty to forget. Even when they were alone together in the tent—and Ivan could not be induced to leave it for more than ten minutes at a time—she would hold up a cautioning finger when he attempted to charge her position behind the fire, waving him frantically back to the seat of honor.

On the evening of the second day, when the Unbashi had gone forth with his water jug to perform the ablutions that preceded his evening prayers, she leaned forward and whispered:

"Be patient and careful, Adash. I have not forgotten. Only think, think of the roads, and be silent."

That night Ivan's mind was at peace, visitors were few and the Unbashi was busy mending his stirrup leathers, so the Russian became exceedingly drowsy, and when the hour came for getting into his rugs he lapsed gratefully into a heavy sleep. Hours later he awoke with a start, unpleasantly conscious of a hand held tightly over his mouth, and a weight upon his chest that pinned him down. He would have struggled violently, but a small, familiar voice sounded in his ear:

"Quiet! Quiet! I came to tell you something, and I was afraid you might start or call out."

The hand was removed from his mouth, and a pair of warm lips replaced it. Ivan lay still, reassured.

"What is it, Adash?" he whispered.

"Listen," she cautioned, excitedly. "A letter came to-day, a yarlik letter from the Padshah, and the Unbashi must go away to-morrow. He will be up and off before

daylight. The Kitai Kaper, the unbelieving Chinaman at Chincheng, has lost two horses, and the Padshah orders us to search for them. The Unbashi will go alone today for the Dorgha, and the Metsup cannot go. Do you understand, Adash? It is our chance. Any road but his. He will certainly ride toward Chincheng first, and then into the desert south of the hills. Our road should be north. It will give us a day, two days perhaps, if we are lucky and no one sees us start. Are you ready, Adash?"

"Aye, more than ready," he replied. "The north road is the best of all—back into the Gobi from which I came, back to the Mongols. There are no roads there, none that your people know at any rate. Then to Pekin and from Pekin to Paris. Kiss me again, Adash."

When Ivan opened his eyes again there was a faint gray light in the patch of sky that was visible through the smoke hole in the roof. He raised himself on his elbow and looked about. The Unbashi was gone, and beside a blazing fire his wife crouched, stirring the inevitable pot. The Russian leaped to his feet, pulled on his boots, and, seizing a water jug, dived through the tent door for a wash. There was a flurry of snow in the air, the ground already was white with it. He looked upon this dispensation of nature with satisfaction, for while a horseman leaves a clear trail in snow there is nothing like falling snow to obliterate a snow trail. For the next half hour they were frantically busy, pouring down hot tea, saddling horses, packing great chunks of boiled and frozen mutton in skin bags, rummaging in the Russian boxes. At last Ivan, his rifle over his back, strode boldly to the sheds, and, in sight of half the settlement, which by now was bustling about the tents, tightened his girth and mounted, announcing to those nearest that he was out for an early shot at the wolves which were reported to be stealing sheep in the lower ravine. This was a very natural pursuit, so the villagers wished him luck, and he rode slowly down the stream bed and into a forest of scrub pines that screened the gorge from one rock wall to another. There he calmly dismounted, made certain that he was out of sight and that no one was following, then turned to his left and led his horse through the close undergrowth to the wall of rock that hemmed in the Tal gorge, and began the ascent of the cliffs by a narrow goat's path which very shortly brought him and his mount gasping and breathless to the summit of the crags. Tal lay snug in the ravine a hundred yards away, every tent spouting smoke like a miniature volcano. The task of getting around the settlement by keeping well back from the edge of the precipice lay before him. There was no brush here, no screen, but by slow advances he was able to take advantage of projecting rocks, and to get his horse over slippery little ledges, and in a quarter of an hour he descended to the gorge again, a hundred yards north of the village now, saw to his girth again, and rode briskly up the ravine that led to the heart of the Barkul range. Two hours riding brought him to the head of the ravine and to the foot of a great swelling knoll that marked the backbone of the ridge, over which led the trail to Bai, also the trail to Uliassutai, the small camel road to Urga and the broad highway to nowhere which Ivan proposed to take. At this point the Russian again dismounted, hobbled his horse, and turned him loose to find what pleasure he could among the brown grass tops that projected above the snow. When he had studied the trail in both directions with scrupulous care, he brushed the snow out of a rock crevice, and dropped down to smoke a cigarette and peruse a pocket map which he spread upon his knees. It was a map of the Chinese empire, which did not show Tal, but which nevertheless made clear the Barkul extension to the great Tien Shan range. Over those wastes he had come and into those wastes he proposed to return. They would not seem so lonely and desolate this time, he mused, and, as if in answer to his thought, the far away clatter of flying hoofs struck upon his ear, and he leaped into the open and peered back into the ravine from which he had so lately emerged. At first nothing was visible, then he saw a patch of color bobbing about in the brush far down and a moment later

he was able to distinguish a horse and rider.

"She has not failed," he muttered, and watched with a smile of satisfaction the remote figure, ever growing larger.

"She has a Valkyrie's eyes, and she rides like one," he said aloud as she came galloping over the last hundred yards of rough ground, perched high upon a great array of saddle bags and rugs, riding loose-reigned but firmly and confidently upon her precarious seat. Her head and shoulders were shrouded in a great blue silk kerchief, the romal of Turkestan, bound about her brows with a flowered cotton handkerchief, and she wore the glossy top bots and many colored paletot of Khotan silk which constitutes the riding habit of Central Asia.

"How did you get away?" he asked.

"I am lending all these things to the Unbashi's sister at Khatuntam," she laughed. "You know they are to have a wedding there next week, and it is expected that they should borrow from their relatives. As for getting away, I did exactly as you did, for I followed your horse's tracks. They are not quite snowed under but they will all be gone in another hour. Throw half of these bags over your saddle. My horse can carry the rest."

She began to pull sacks of provisions and rolls of bedding off her horse. In another moment all was adjusted, they mounted, and their horses breasted the steep climb with a vigor that proved them fresh and fit. Over the knoll they rode, then into a deep, transverse valley, over a second knoll, and into a second valley. Another rise lay before them, so they pulled up to breathe their horses and admire the view that opened out to their right. Far down a treeless valley, five miles away perhaps, the gentle slope dropped away in a precipice, it seemed, and beyond lay the great, golden, waterless Gobi, dry, warm and sparkling even through the flurry of snow. Suddenly the girl started, and struck her horse sharply across the flanks.

"Khudah!" she exclaimed, and then shouted back over her shoulder as her horse rushed up the opposing knoll. "The Unbashi! Are you blind? Haven't you seen him? He has seen you, I tell you!"

Ivan stared down the long valley dumbfounded. Certainly he had seen nothing, but he knew enough of Tartar eyes to look again, and then far down where the valley seemed to fall away to the desert, he saw a black dot and no more. It might have been a rabbit, or a stray goat, or again it might have been a horseman. He could not tell, but he knew that she could, so he followed her example, lashed up his horse and overtook her at the top of the rise.

After that their ride was of the nature of a flight. There was no more leisurely cantering, no more rests for the overtaxed animals. They rode wildly and recklessly up trying slopes, and went whirling down into the valleys. Their stout little animals strained and gasped, and the riders lashed them mercilessly.

At last the climbing ended and they descended into a ravine opening out to the north upon the Gobi. Here they looked over their shoulders, and their last glimpse of the snow-clad hills at their back, as they rode into the friendly shelter of the scrub pine again, revealed a squat horseman silhouetted against the gray heavens. There could be no error this time. It was the Unbashi, and the Unbashi knew whom he was tracking.

In another hour they were in the desert, flying over the great gravel plain, heads down, whips whirling, their faces blood red from the wind. When they had gone half an hour into the waste, the woman peered over her shoulder in the direction from which they had come and shouted to her companion, "Look!"

Ivan turned quickly, surveyed in a glance the whole line of round hills and sharp, icy peaks that rose behind them, and found the dark mouth of the ravine just in time to see a lone horseman sweep out into the open and come down upon their trail in a magnificent curve. The Unbashi was riding like a Tartar, handling his horse beautifully, and as Ivan knew, he had a horse that understood.

Five miles ahead a cluster of sand dunes rose against the sky. The woman pointed towards these with her whip and Ivan understood. They must get there ahead of that one-eyed devil-horseman.

The distance was covered in a trice, but to the fugitives it seemed endless. Once the woman's horse fell to his knees and went skidding over the rough gravel leaving a ten-foot trail of blood. A Cossack could have made an easy apology for flying out of the saddle, but to Ivan's amazement the little woman leaned back and sat firm, pulling her horse to his feet and lashing him viciously.

As they reached the first low dune the Russian looked back and noted that their pursuer was still five hundred yards away. They rode over the soft rise of yielding sand into a still softer gulley and up the opposite slope. As they were descending from the summit of this mound Ivan's horse sank to his knees in the sand and his impetus sent him flying in a marvelous whirl of legs, boots, saddle bags, man and rifle, down the yielding slope. They fell heavily, the horse flat on his side, the man on his hands and knees some yards further down, and trappings everywhere. In a fashion which neither of them could have explained the Unbashi's wife was off her horse and by his side before he had recovered from the shock. Her flashing eyes spoke her excitement, but she was smiling and tugging with all her strength at the big man to get him upon his feet.

"Your rifle!" she screamed into his ear.

He made no reply, but unslung it as they scrambled hastily back up the slope to the summit from which he had descended with so little dignity. They threw themselves flat and peered over. For the fraction of a second their pursuer was not visible; then he came up over the first dune, a hundred yards away, a veritable bolt of speed and energy.

But his ardor was not keener than his sight. He saw them, the peaks of their caps and the projecting barrel of the Russian's rifle, and with a presence of mind that aroused Ivan's wonder he pulled his foaming horse on its haunches, rolled off, and was down behind a thorny shrub before the animal had brought itself to a stop. It took him another infinitesimal fraction of time to get his long rifle into position, but in that second Ivan had drawn a cool, sure line upon him and fired.

Almost at the same instant the heavy ball from the Turki's long gun clipped through the top of the Russian's Astrakhan cap and went singing on its way.

"You have hit him or he would not have missed," the woman said softly, with satisfaction in her tone. But the Russian was not certain. He watched the thorn bush intently, and, at last, after what seemed an eternity, a dark streak came zigzagging out from under the shadow of the thorn and ate into the brown sand.

Mrs. Unbashi turned to look at him, but his face was turned away, and he had covered his eyes with his hand. She waited a moment, and, as he did not move, she rose to her knees and said:

"We must have that horse, Adash."

Still there was no reply, so she continued:

"I shall go after it. Let me have your knife. You see to our horses. The shots have frightened them, they have bolted."

Still without replying, he drew a long knife from his belt, four inches of handle and eight inches of shining blade, and handed it to her. When he looked over the ridge again she was stooping over the body, holding the Unbashi's mount with her left hand. The right hand, the hand with the knife, he could not see, and did not want to. He turned and descended the slope to attend to their frightened animals.

When she returned he was adjusting the saddles and collecting his scattered baggage. She came up to him smiling, and handed him the knife. He scarcely dared look at it as he replaced it in its sheaf, but he saw the steel flash and knew it was clean. Then she put her hand in her bosom and drew out two small articles which she held out to him, smiling. They were the Unbashi's jade snuff bottle and a small ingot of Chinese silver. He shuddered, turned his head and looked again, then burst out in a great laugh, as he seized the little woman's hand, drew her to him and crushed her against his breast.

"I have learned something today, Ayla," he said gaily as he tilted her head back and smiled down at her.

"What is it, Adash?" she asked, as she laughed up at him.

"I have learned to kill."

DORNER AND THE DEACONS

By RAMSEY BENSON

Dorner, who is an adept at effecting mergers and browbeating the Board of Trade, encounters a bit of opposition when he tries to use his Board of Trade manners and methods in settling religious controversy.

IF money talks the secretary's quarter spoke of the way Dorner had with him. A freight had tumbled into the ditch a mile or two up the line, Dorner's special train would be detained at Bambury indefinitely and the secretary paid the black porter the quarter to tell Dorner—paid it cheerfully, too, as with a sense of getting his money's worth. Confidentially he would have paid more.

Wherever Dorner went he caused the earth to tip up, in a manner of speaking. In another manner of speaking he was the Big Smoke in meat, wheat and transportation, not to mention side lines, the amount of it being that his way was any way which happened to suit him at the moment, regardless of other considerations. He didn't relish bad news and he didn't have to pretend that he did and his secretary, admonished by past experience, would rather somebody else went back with the tidings of the freight in the ditch.

He put it up to the conductor first. The agent at Bambury got his orders to set the blocks and as soon as Dorner's special drew up he passed the word to the conductor. The secretary came out to see what was in the wind and the conductor passed the word to him, whereupon the secretary's alert vision foresaw the unpleasant duty and cast about for the means of dodging it. "Just step back," quoth he, cloaking his reluctance under an easy, offhand air, "and tell the old man!" But the conductor hadn't time, or pretended he hadn't time, and the secretary was reduced to treat with the black porter.

The porter knew not Dorner, and the quarter looked good to him. He made a pretext to loiter through the car.

"What the hell we loafin' here for?" demanded the Big Smoke, savagely. He had been asleep and nobody had a better right to wake up cross.

"Wreck up de line, sah! Yes, sah!" the porter replied, with the perfect suavity of his kind.

Dorner glared out of the window. "What God-forsaken hole is it, anyhow?"

"Dunno, sah. Ah nebber did inquiah, sah."

Dorner did the last thing you would expect him to do. He burst out laughing. Merrily, too—wonder of wonders, the premises being what they were, the Big Smoke was tickled.

He didn't say why, though. Still laughing he rose and stretched himself. Dorner stood six feet four in his stockings and he weighed well over two hundred. It needed no stretching to make his aspect tremendous, laughter or no laughter, The porter recoiled instinctively. "Yes, sah!" he stammered, and while he didn't exactly flee the spot he faded out of sight without any undue delay.

The inevitable crowd about the station was recruited to its full strength that day. Dorner's special hadn't been advertised ahead, but everybody knew it was a special the minute it whistled and a population with little or nothing else to do made no long job of finding out whose. The discovery jolted Bambury quite a bit, for even in that remote corner of the world Dorner's name was a household word. The population were far from having outgrown the primitive practice of killing their own beef and pork, but both stores carried potted meat with ham flavor and

every can did its part to make Dorner famous. It was Dorner's potted meat with ham flavor, and Dorner's Vienna sausage, and even though the population scarcely ever purchased these dainties, they had read the labels a thousand times or more. Moreover it was firmly believed of Dorner that he fixed the price of cattle and wheat to suit his own convenience, and the farmers were forever growling about him and blaming him and saying that he ought to be hanged, drawn and quartered or at least put in jail. Some farmers argued, for political effect, that it was the tariff, but more argued that it was Dorner; and what with one thing and another his fame was such that the population were not likely to neglect the chance of getting sight of him. That was why they flocked down to the station in such unusual numbers. There was a chance that they might see the Big Smoke himself and, failing in that, it was worth their while just to see the train which he journeyed about in.

They saw him. The train hadn't been halted more than a few minutes when a gigantic figure loomed up in the door of the rear car and a thrill of recognition ran through the crowd. Nobody had ever seen him before or even a picture of him, but everybody understood at once that a man couldn't look like that and be anybody but Dorner. "That's him!" went the word, winging swiftly from lip to lip.

The crowd drifted toward him, as upon the common impulse of an ungovernable curiosity yet with a degree of hesitancy. If Dorner had been a grizzly bear, fearsome but fascinating, the population wouldn't have acted very differently. They drifted toward him and he by no means shunned the encounter. He stepped down off the platform and came forward rather briskly and almost at once he let his voice be heard—the big voice that had cowed the Chicago Board of Trade, to say nothing of other prodigies only less prodigious.

"Whadya call your town?" he inquired, gruffly but not unkindly.

Voices no better than squeaks by comparison were promptly lifted up to inform him, half a dozen speaking at once.

"Bambury!" repeated Dorner, and glanced over the crowd's heads like a schoolmaster towering above his children. "Ha—how many people?"

It was just here that Peg McKim emerged into the limelight. Peg was always of the crowd that loitered about the station. Loitering, in fact, was virtually all he did from morning till night. A trifler and a sot, who let his wife wash to support the family, he had nevertheless a nimble wit and it was a cold day when he couldn't start a laugh.

Peg saw his opportunity and embraced it. "You can count 'em for yourself—they're all here," he piped.

Bambury went up in gales of merriment. Peg's joke was a slam at the population but no matter—wit was wit and they laughed inordinately. Dorner didn't exactly join but his rugged face softened visibly. For the moment he didn't look a bit dangerous and the crowd edged nearer, Peg McKim to the fore.

Dorner's keen eye swept the prospect swiftly. "Ha—hum! Two churches!" he remarked, and his brow darkened.

The crowd caught the chill of his altered demeanor and nobody had a word to say, not even Peg.

"Two churches, and both starving, I'll warrant!" sneered Dorner, in a manner of scorn that struck to the crowd's marrow. "I wonder if anybody knows wherein they differ—as to their teachings, I mean, and the work they profess to be doing."

Irony! Of course the Big Smoke meant to intimate that the two churches didn't differ at all in their teachings, that they amounted to a wasteful division of forces aimed at identical ends.

He reckoned without Peg, however. Peg was a scoffer first, last and all the time, with the smallest respect for holy things, but in order to give play and opportunity to his wit he would pretend to stand up for the churches.

"Why, yes," he made answer, with the serious air which gave zest to his best jokes. "That church with the spire leaned over to one side like it had been out late the night before, it teaches that Adam was a good feller till he ate the apple, and the

other church, with the clapboards off the front gable, it teaches that he was a crook and a horsethief right from the start."

Peg's pleasantry touched ticklish ground. The population weren't all scoffers though a majority might be indifferent, and the crowd responded rather guardedly. It laughed, but not uproariously, and when it perceived how Dorner scowled it laughed no more. He scowled blackly.

"I want," he boomed out, like a big bell tolling, "to talk with a leading man or two of each of these churches. I've got something to say to them."

A hush fell upon the crowd. There was a nervous shifting of feet. The population had more than ever the aspect of little boys in front of their schoolmaster. Nobody stood forth. "Come, come—I'm not fooling!" prompted the Big Smoke, impatiently, and still nobody stood forth.

It wasn't like Dorner to give up. Having set his hand to the plow he wouldn't turn back. He had recourse to Peg McKim. "Do you, sir, belong to either of these churches?" he demanded, briskly.

"Not guilty," pleaded Peg, and the crowd snickered a little.

"Well, can you point me out men who do belong?" Magisterially, even inquisitionally, Dorner put it to Peg. Having set himself to find out something the schoolmaster wouldn't be baffled.

Peg looked about him. "Why, yes. If it ain't no violation of confidence, there's Deacon Griggs over there by the truck, and Elder Packard in the door of the depot, and Gib Hess yonder and—oh, there's several. Do you want 'em all?"

Dorner didn't say. In fact he paid no further attention to Peg, but addressed himself to the parties whom Peg had designated. "Mr. Griggs and Mr. Packard and Mr.—er—will you come up here? I never waste time talking to a man unless I've got something to offer him that'll be to to his interest and advantage. You may not believe that but it's so."

The Big Smoke's big voice boomed persuasively, not to say compulsively, and half a dozen men made their way to the forward rim of the crowd. There they lined up more or less raggedly, like a class. Others fell back to make room for them. Even Peg McKim fell back and flaunted his wit no more.

Dorner squared his massive shoulders. The Chicago Board of Trade had seen him do that thing and trembled at the sight. Bambury didn't get all the implications and it didn't exactly tremble, but it grew very still and what was more, speaking by and large, it wouldn't be Deacon Griggs, or Elder Packard, or Gib Hess, or any of the others up there, for considerable.

The Big Smoke opened up rather mildly: "I'm not here, my friends, to sit in judgment on any man's beliefs. We live in a free country and I have too much business of my own that interests me very much to be mixing in somebody else's that doesn't interest me a bit. In a sense it's nothing to me or to any other sensible person how many churches there are, so long as there are not so many that they get in one another's way and so bring about a condition of economic waste. Everybody is concerned with economic waste and bound by a consideration of his own welfare to protest against it. When churches spend more energy fighting each other than they spend fighting the devil I have the right, though I belong to no church, to object to that sort of foolishness. I mean no disrespect, further than I have indicated, when I ask you gentlemen if there is any solid, substantial reason why you can't all work and worship in one church."

No answer. The class didn't venture a lisp. Dorner asked each of them separately, going down the line in the manner of giving out a hard word, and still he got no answer.

"Very well, gentlemen. Since you have nothing to say to the contrary I assume that there is no solid, substantial reason why you can't all work and worship in one church and I assume it the more readily because I believe it myself. I haven't a doubt, to be perfectly frank, that the only reason for two churches here in your little village is jealousy and pride of opinion, and where you sow such seed as that you can't expect to harvest much good. But I didn't call you up here to say that. I

called you up here to make an offer. If you will join together and form one church I will give you $5,000 in cash for the good of the cause. Half that sum will build a much better building than either of these and the other half will equip it in good, modern style. Now, what do you say?"

Peg McKim ran home. His wife had sent by him for cornmeal and she couldn't bake bread for dinner till he fetched it. That gave Peg a lively personal interest in the delivery of the goods and so he ran home, in the very midst of the extraordinary developments at the station.

He burst into the house breathless and boiling over. It was his way. Peg couldn't be called a reserved fellow, even at home.

"Dorner's got a bunch of saints nailed to the cross over there!" he exulted. "I'll have to hurry back. I wouldn't miss it for twice the price of admission. It's the biggest show I ever did see. Good old Deacon Griggs and all the rest of the chosen seed of Israel's race, the ransomed of the fall—you ought to see 'em tuck their heads like whipped puppies."

Mrs. McKim straightened up. A thick steam rose from her tubs and she regarded Peg through it sourly. "Who's Dorner?" she snapped.

"Who's Dorner? You'll be asking who's Carnegie next—or who's Rockefeller. Why, Mr. Dorner of Chicago—our old friend and feller citizen that furnishes an ungrateful world with its embalmed beef, and corners the wheat market just for exercise before breakfast. He's started for somewhere in his special train, but the Lord had the nerve to wreck a freight up the line and so his nobs is tied up here in Bambury for a spell."

Mrs. McKim didn't so much as bat an eyelash. The Big Smoke's unlooked for presence signified nothing to her, in itself. But the implications interested her. "What's that got to do with Deacon Griggs?" she demanded.

"Well, it looks like Dorner got off the train to stretch his legs and about the first thing he spied our two beautiful cathedrals, and somehow they didn't impress him favorably. Don't know as I understand just why he should mistrust the town wasn't big enough for so much ecclesiastical architecture, but anyhow he did, or he acted as if he did. He ain't bashful, Dorner ain't. He don't do a thing but call for some of the leading men of both churches to come up and hear what he has to say to 'em. They ain't what you might call plum' anxious, but finally he gets a row of 'em lined up in front of him. Now, says he, gentlemen, is there any reason in the wide world why you all can't worship together in one church? He asked 'em that and they didn't let a peep out of them. They couldn't say a word. All they could do was to look sheepish.

"Dorner didn't hem and haw. You don't catch him taking two bites at a cherry. Very well, gentlemen, says he, there being no reason I want to make you an offer. If you'll get together and form one church I'll give you $5,000 in cash for a new edifice. That'll put up a better building than either of these you've got and leave something over."

Mrs. McKim dried her arms and rolled down her sleeves. "Five thousand!" repeated Peg, impressively, but he called forth no comment from his wife. She caught the neck of her gingham gown together where she had worn it open at her work, clapped a sunbonnet over her damp and disordered hair and started for the door.

"Where you going?" asked Peg, his face suddenly sober.

"You'll see if you come along!" retorted Mrs. McKim, drily.

But Peg didn't go along. He watched his wife and saw her leave the house and the yard and scurry swiftly up the street. He held his breath when she reached the corner and when she turned toward the station and vanished his face registered consternation. Somehow he didn't care to go back any more.

A tall, gaunt woman with a jaw like a steel trap and a light in her eye that boded no good to all such and sundry as should venture to get in her way, pushed and shouldered through the crowd and planted herself between the schoolmaster and his class of little boys. She took the center of the stage at once; her very aspect gave it to her. The little boys fell

out of the picture altogether and even the school master shrank into the background.

A woman alone in the midst of a crowd of men, but she was in nowise abashed. Nor did she concede much to sweet courtesy and polite usage. "You're Dorner, I take it!" she flashed at the Big Smoke.

"Dorner's my name," he acknowledged, with some signs of being taken aback—not quite so big smokily, in short.

"I've heard of you," the woman went on, without pausing. "I use your lard when I can't get country lard. It's fair to middling lard for the money. I haven't got anything against you."

"Thank you, ma'am. I like to meet people who are pleased with my goods," Dorner replied, and smiled—actually he smiled, so that his bushy brows relaxed and his eyes twinkled kindly.

But the woman didn't soften. "I'm not here to say pretty things about your goods. I left my washing to run over and tell you why there's two churches in Bambury, and why there's two churches so many places where men like you think one church is a great plenty. I want to tell you why two weak churches are better than one strong church."

Dorner unbent his great figure to bow. "I shall be glad to hear you, ma'am, I'm sure. I've been wishing for a good many years for somebody to tell me just that."

"No man knows everything, and where a man knows a whole lot about one thing the chances are he don't know much about anything else," expounded Mrs. McKim. "I say it without disrespect because I haven't got a thing against you and I'm not one of those that think a man ought to be took out and shot just because he's got rich quick. You know all about lard and wheat and such like, but you don't know about churches. You think a church ought to be strong, like a bank. You think a church ought to be easy in money matters. You're wrong—as wrong as you can be. A church ain't like a bank. It ain't like anything else in the world—that is, if it's a church.

"We used to live in Cleveland before we came out here, and I belonged to what you'd call a strong church there. It wasn't Rockefeller's church but it was like his—just as prosperous in the worldly way. The seats were free and they never took up a collection. They had an organ that cost $20,000 and they paid a man $5,000 a year to play it. I don't know how much they paid the choir but it was as good a choir as any in Cleveland. I mean it cost as much. The minister's salary was $10,000 a year and he was a fine preacher—imported from England. I don't deny that I liked to hear him and I never did hear him without being benefited. He had the power of uplift. But that's not all, Dorner. The uplift that counts ain't somebody putting a lever under you and prying you into glory; it's where you go up by your own boosting. I was a member of that strong church in good and regular standing. The preaching was as much for me as for anybody, and the music, and all the rest. But what did I give in return? Nothing—not a penny. From first to last I never lifted a finger; it was all done for me. They made the gospel free and free gospel is a humbug, as I see it. The vineyard where the laborers don't do a thing but loaf and eat grapes doesn't look like much of a vineyard to me.

"Here in Bambury we've got two poor little struggling churches and I say God bless 'em for being poor and little and struggling.

"'Must Jesus bear his cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me!'

"Praise the Lord! It's the cross that saves us and not free gospel. I belong to one of these little churches and of course I think it's the true church, but I don't want the other little churches abolished to make it strong. God forbid! God bless all the little weak churches; they're doing God's work as no strong church can do it. There's something for everybody to do in a little church—real labor, and it takes real labor to make a real vineyard. We have to dig hard for every penny we raise and the digging is what counts. Get that, Dorner—the digging is what counts."

The smile vanished from the Big Smoke's face. The bushy bows drew to-

gether once more. But his scowl was the scowl of perplexity rather than displeasure. He gave the woman a queer, startled look, as if she somehow made him uneasy. She didn't waver. The fact that she confronted the most powerful capitalist of the age, if it was present to her mind at all, didn't dismay her in the least. She looked him straight in the eye and if his face darkened with doubt hers shone with serene confidence.

She wasn't done with him, either. "Listen to me, Dorner. I'm going to tell you something else you don't know. At least I don't think you know it because I don't think there's any way you could find it out, in your kind of business. The backbone of religion is service. The heart of religion is service. The soul of religion is service. Service in the way of sacrifice—service that costs you something. That's what saves us, and mighty little of it your strong churches bring about. I don't know what you and the menfolks have fixed up between you. I'm told that you offer them $5,000 if they'll join together in one church, and if they choose to take you up I can't stop 'em. But I give you fair warning here and now—you and them—that there'll still be two churches in Bambury if I have to start another all by myself, not because I am so sure that my belief is the only right belief, but because I've no use in the world for anything but a weak church. It's the only kind that's worth its salt, so far as religion is concerned. Maybe it don't look so well. Maybe it don't do so much to boom real estate. But it's the real thing just the same. I wouldn't give that for a strong church!"

Mrs. McKim snapped her fingers. Dorner's nose wasn't far away.

A wrecking train with a number of smashed cars in tow clattered through and by that gave token that the track was clear. The driver of Dorner's special let go three toots of his whistle to admonish the world that he was about to back out of the siding, and Bambury pressed forward to get another glimpse of the Big Smoke, if so they might. They got it. Dorner sat by the big window of his car, in plain sight. He seemed to be dictating to his secretary, but whatever he was doing he didn't look out. Bambury looked in with all of its eyes as the train glided away, but Dorner didn't look out.

Peg McKim wasn't there to see him off. In point of fact Peg didn't live up to his traditions that day. It was a day of wonders, and Peg's departure from his beaten path was by no means the least of these. For three solid hours the sound of an ax struck unremittingly into good dry oak shattered Bambury's quiet, and it was Peg's ax. At the moment Bambury caught its last glimpse of the Big Smoke, Peg had achieved a pile of stove wood as high as his head and he didn't stop. The population still heard the sound of his ax after it had grown so dark they wondered how he could see where to strike.

All of which happened nearly a year ago. But if you chance to pass through Bambury you observe that the two churches are there yet. The spire of the one lops a little more and the clapboards of the other hang a trifle looser, but otherwise the vineyard seems not to have been disturbed.

IN THE August number: THE EPISTLES OF TERRENCE, another story by Ramsey Benson. It relates how a young lady wrecks the hopes of a senatorial candidate. There is a certain scrappy editor who needs assistance and gets it.

SAIL AND WASSAIL

By EDWIN DIAL TORGERSON

The story of a dry cruise—and proof, at last, that the editors do not insist upon the conventional happy ending!

THE auxiliary sloop Wampus Cat wasn't a sloop at all. Thacker figured nobody could tell the difference, so long as she had a jib. As a catboat she had wept for more cats to sail against. There simply wasn't another "model cat" of her depth and speed in Gulf waters, so what was there to do but have her graduated into a sloop?

Thacker had resolved to open correspondence with Sir Thomas Lipton after she had romped away with the model cat cup at the Biloxi regatta. It was unnecessary to explain to the fellows at home, of course, that the Wampus Cat merely had sailed around the course twice, and had won the trophy because no other boat of her rank and rig had been entered.

Now she was a sloop, ready for her annual vacation cruise down the Gulf Coast. She never would sail again, as a racer, for an auxiliary engine had been installed—a most unsailorly and disgusting expedient, as they said at the yacht club.

Thacker had rechristened her Flying Cloud, and then christened her back to Wampus Cat. Wall-Eye Joe was responsible for that. Wall-Eye had helped sail her in the regattas. He had accompanied Thacker on his annual cruises, as steward, boatswain, first mate, second mate, porter, butler and man-of-all-work.

"Naw, suh, Boss," Wall-Eye had protested. "I don't sails on dat boat if you change her name. I done been on too many boats fo' dis 'un, Mr. Thacker. I ain't sailed 'fo de mast eight years for nuffin. Ef you change her name you sho will have bad luck, an' dat ain't no lie."

"Don't be so superstitious, Wall-Eye," chided Thacker. "This isn't a regular ship, you know. Your rules of hard luck might work with a three-masted schooner, but they don't apply to a thirty-foot catbo—er, sloop."

"Yes dey does, Boss," insisted Joe, solemnly. "You better take my admonitions, suh."

So Wampus Cat she remained, and when Thacker's friend Dave Colt and a fat and landlubberly person by name of Horace Pearsall rowed out with their luggage on the eve of the annual cruise, she was the same proud vessel of old, except for the new jib that flapped at her bow.

"Where's Tinman?" asked Thacker, when he saw that only two of his guests had arrived.

"Missed his train," grunted Colt. "Just got a wire from him at the hotel. He says he'll join us down the coast, at Biloxi, if he can."

"Too bad," said Thacker. "Too bad. And all these wet goods gone to waste! I know you chaps never drink—" He winked at Dave. "Tinman said he was coming along just to get a bottle of beer once again. These poor inland fellows in prohibition states never smell it any more. Eh, Pearsall?"

"Righto," grinned Pearsall, with a smack of anticipation. "It's worth journeying to the coast once a year at vacation time just to wet your parching esophagus. But say, Mr. Thacker, isn't this—er—Wampus Cat a trifle small? I have a game leg, you know."

Dave Colt looked the landlubber over in disgust.

"Small? What do you want?" he snorted. "Think we need a young Mauretania to take four ginks wassailing down the Gulf?

Why, there's plenty of room for ten, and that cork leg of yours will just make the boat lighter. You'll want to sleep on deck, anyway. Ain't that right, Wall-Eye?"

"Yas, suh," agreed Joe, busily splicing the mainsheet. "Dey ain't much room below on account of de beer and de other refreshments. We's got to be careful wid dat stuff, too, Boss. You can't tell when a po-lice boat's goner ketch you."

"Police boat?" gasped Pearsall. "You don't mean to say they pinch you for taking a drink at sea, too?"

"Yas suh ree," replied Wall-Eye. "Dey sho does. Dey's liable to ketch us and tow us back to poht for smugglin' liquor."

"Soft-pedal that stuff, Joe," snapped Thacker. "There's very little danger of that, gentlemen. If you see a police boat coming you dump your liquor in the sea, that's all."

"That's all?" echoed Pearsall, hollowly. "Ain't that enough, after you've come two hundred miles for a bottle of beer and a little salt air?"

"It'll be all right," Thacker assured him. "The only thing I regret is that Charley Tinman didn't show up. There's a man that enjoys these trips. How about waiting for him until to-morrow, Colt?"

"Not much chance of his coming, Thack—"

Wall-Eye Joe interrupted with a squeal.

"Go on, Boss! You ain't talkin' about goin' to-morrow, is you? Quit funnin' wid dis nigger! To-morrow's Friday, Boss!"

"And it's the thirteenth, too," muttered Pearsall, sepulchrally. "I ain't much strong on this trip, Colt."

"Swell bunch of pikers!" cried Dave. "What the blazes do we care if it's Friday the thirteenth? That stuff may go with ignorant seamen, but it gets by me. All right, Thacker, let's you and I sail the darned boat by ourselves, and leave Pearsall to take a passenger steamer."

"Scuse me for buttin' in, Boss," Wall-Eye remonstrated. "Mr. Thacker know I ain't backin' out o' nothin'. But he sho hadn't oughter make me leave on a voyage on Friday. Hit don't matter about de firteenth. Hit's de Friday what makes me almighty skeered. I ain't never sailed on a Friday cep'n we hit a hurricane or somebody got drownded."

"Well, we'll sail to-day," Thacker decided. "I guess Charley will join us at Biloxi. Think we'll have a fair wind to-night, Wall-Eye, or will we have to use the engine?"

"Dat engine ain't goner run, Boss," lamented Joe. "Hit mought be all right till you needs it bad, but hit won't run in a 'mergency. I wisht you'd a-taken hit out. Hit's ruinin' a good boat."

"We'll take a chance," said Thacker. "Let's get her trimmed up and hoist sail."

Sail was raised, after manifold preparations. Then Joe stopped and looked at the sky.

"Hit's a squall comin', Boss," he announced. "Does de gen'lemen mind a little rough sailin'?"

Pearsall glanced nervously at the little white clouds that floated above.

"Where is it?" he queried, anxiously.

"You can't see hit, but hit's comin'," said Joe. "I knows, 'cause I feels it in my rheumatics."

"Better wait a while," cautioned Thacker.

They waited. Colt busied himself unpacking his grip, and Pearsall smoked cigarettes. Absolute calm prevailed, and then a tiny ripple stirred the surface of the bay. The sky began to look hazy in the north; a dull cloud rose from the horizon. The wind freshened.

"Lower sail," ordered Thacker. "We're pulling too hard on the buoy. We might as well go ashore, fellows. There's a squall coming, and the wind will be dead after it passes. We can leave to-night, I guess, by using the engine, but we might as well go to Dave's hotel and see if there is another message from Tinman."

The rain came suddenly as they rowed ashore, and with it a wind that portended nothing but evil to Pearsall. He shuddered to think what would happen when they got out to sea.

There was a second telegram from Tinman. It was possible he would arrive late Friday, but they needn't wait for him; he would join them down the coast.

The squall passed, but the engine of the

Wampus Cat balked obstinately that night. Sail was hoisted again and Wall-Eye Joe whistled mournfully for the wind, a trick of his that was uncannily successful most of the time. The wind was dead. To leave on Thursday was out of the question.

Friday the thirteenth came, and a spanking norther lashed the bay.

"Just the weather!" cried Thacker. "It couldn't be better. I'll bet the blamed engine works now."

He gave the fly wheel a turn and the engine started with a roar.

"Luck!" he ejaculated. "Why, we've got wind and power both. Come on, Joe. Hoist sail! There's no use to wait any longer for Charley Tinman."

"Hit's Friday, Boss," said Joe, sadly. "Don't forget hit's Friday, Boss."

"Friday be jiggered," yelled Dave Colt, loosing the halyards. "Off we go, boys! Man the jibsheet, Nigger. Crawl up forward and get ready to cast off, Pearsall. What's that? Your stiff leg? All right, Thacker, I'll do it. Grab the tiller."

Off went the good ship Wampus Cat, on Friday the thirteenth of August.

It was a sailor's day of days, and the night that followed was clear and fresh and glorified by the kind of moon you read about. Nothing happened worthy of entry in the logbook, except that a silver eel leaped over the leeward gunwhale and almost scared Pearsall overboard. He admitted he thought it was a shark.

On Saturday the fourteenth the Wampus Cat neared her first port of call, a summer resort down the bay. The sky was overcast, the wind a bit puffy.

A squall broke, and the Wampus Cat bucked the waves gamely, pitching and rolling. Thacker took a double reef and finally lowered sail and anchored. Pearsall's face wore a ghastly pallor.

"Why, I do believe he's seasick," remarked Colt, in mock surprise. "This ain't a storm, Pearsall. Wait till you get to sea before you start to pull that *mal de mer* stuff."

Pearsall communed dismally with the fishes over the starboard side.

"I'm sick, fellows," he moaned. "Don't laugh at me."

"We hadn't oughter lef' on Friday, Boss," said Wall-Eye Joe.

"Say that again and you'll get no shore leave," warned Thacker, sharply. "We've had enough from you."

The squall abated, and the Wampus Cat presently puffed into the port of Fairhope under power.

There was dancing and bathing and fun with the beach girls at Fairhope; but grim disaster shadowed the path of Dave Colt. While wading in the shallows after an invigorating swim, he slipped and sat heavily upon a vagrant oyster shell. It was sharp. For days he sat upon nothing else.

Pearsall found comfort in his sarcastic friend's affliction, when the Wampus Cat resumed her cruise. He was no longer troubled with seasickness, and Dave suffered something worse, in that he was unable to rest gracefully except in certain unseamanlike postures.

"Try the starboard exposure, Dave," jibed Pearsall. "You don't have to be sitting down all the time, do you?"

"I sho wisht we hadn't lef' on Fri—"

Thacker hurled a tin of biscuits at Wall-Eye Joe.

"What did I tell you about that confounded nonsense?" he shouted.

"Yas, suh," said Joe. "I won't say hit, Boss, but I sho does w-wish hit. Mister Dave wouldn't 'a stuck hisself wid dat oyster shell ef—All right, suh. Yas, suh!"

The Wampus Cat was crawling through the shallows of Grant's Pass, and Mississippi Sound was in sight, when the centerboard grated sandy bottom.

"Throw her in the wind," shouted Thacker. "We're aground!"

The Wampus Cat made a manful effort to come about, and stalled hopelessly.

"Crank the engine, Joe," yelled Thacker.

Wall-Eye heaved desperately at the fly wheel, and only a sickly grunt came from the engine.

"Hit's no use, Boss," wailed Joe. "I done tole you we hadn't oughter lef' on Fri—Yassuh, yassuh, Boss; I'se crankin'!"

At two A. M. the high tide ended a sullen vigil aboard the stranded Wampus Cat, and the little sloop rolled happily free.

"Now, you get back in that skiff, Wall-

Eye, and stay there," ordered the skipper, sternly.

Joe penitently drew in the skiff that was towed in the wake of the Wampus Cat and accepted his punishment in silence. The small boat was the "brig" of the Wampus Cat. It was extremely soggy and uncomfortable riding, but Joe was a sailor.

The sloop glided along quietly in a light morning breeze. The moon was obscured by clouds. There was a sickly sound to the wash of the waves, somehow, and the mainsail fluttered and jerked now and then.

"Hey, Joe," called Thacker. "What's happening?"

Joe was sound asleep in the skiff.

"Joe!" yelled Thacker again.

Colt picked up a circular life preserver upon which he vainly had attempted to sit, and hurled it at the sleeping darkey. It woke him, but too late.

An alarming puff of wind caught the Wampus Cat with a sagging mainsheet, and around came the boom with an ominous crack. Colt dodged just in time to escape being knocked overboard. As the Wampus Cat jibed, a furious squall descended. The sloop flew zigzag through the blackness. Joe was shouting at the top of his voice from the skiff, but no one could hear what he said, except something like "We hadn't oughter lef'—" The mainsail dipped perilously into the frothing waters, and spanked the waves with a phosphorescent glare. The boat listed menacingly to port.

"Cut the halyards!" screamed Thacker. "Get down that sail, and cast anchor!"

Pearsall, crouching in the cabin, was frightened speechless. Dave Colt cut loose the halyards and down came jib and mainsail with a nauseating swish. Then he groped amid muddy hawsers on the bow and cast the anchor over.

The Wampus Cat, bereft of sail and supposedly at anchor, swept on regardless.

"The anchor's dragging!" shouted Thacker, in wild dismay. "What's the matter, Dave? Did you put the pin in the cross-piece?"

Colt prided himself upon being a sailor, but he had forgotten the pin that held the cross-piece of the anchor in place, and without which the instrument was useless.

He dragged feverishly at the cable and hoisted the anchor back on board, while great waves sloshed over the bow.

"There isn't any pin for the cross-piece," he stormed. "That nigger's got it in his pocket, back in the skiff. Drag in the skiff!"

"Not on your life," cried Thacker. "You'll swamp the cursed boat, and us, too. Let that nigger go. We've got to ride out this squall. Hoist the jib again."

In open water there would have been slight danger, but the storm-tossed sloop was flying at top speed between pilings and dredge boats and other obstructions caused by dredging operations in the narrow neck known as Grant's Pass.

"Strap on your life preservers, boys," ordered Thacker, grimly.

Pearsall stumbled out of the cabin and covered his ears to shut out the noise of the shrieking wind.

"I can't find a life preserver," he wailed. "Dave threw the last one at the nigger, back in the skiff."

"Hell!" shouted Thacker.

Pearsall had an idea born of desperation. He sat down and feverishly unshipped his cork leg.

"There's *one* man aboard with a life preserver," he cried. Then he plunged his hand into his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills. He stuffed them grimly into the orifice of his cork leg, and applied the straps tightly.

"When do we jump, Thacker!" he yelled.

But the Wampus Cat was leaping joyously before the wind on the broad bosom of Mississippi Sound. The dangerous pass was conquered. As suddenly as it had risen, the squall calmed down. With no canvas on but the jib, the Wampus Cat frolicked on for a while under a stiff breeze. Then came a dead calm.

At dawn they saw Wall-Eye Joe peacefully asleep in the skiff.

"Drag him in," directed Thacker. "We'll need him to uncork a bottle of whiskey."

A damp wind began to whisper from the north, and the yachtsmen shivered in their wet clothing.

"Thank bountiful Heaven, we've got some red liquor," exclaimed Dave Colt, fervently, as he hauled in the skiff.

Joe came aboard grinning.

"Hit warn't such a bad night as hit mought o' been, Boss," he observed, "but I sho was skeered about dat Friday—"

"Damn you, Joe," hissed Thacker. "If you say that again we'll chuck you overboard. Get out a bottle of whiskey."

Wall-Eye started for the cabin, looked out over the smooth morning sea, and stopped short.

"Boss, dey's a boat off to starboard," he remarked. "Lemme yoh' glasses, please, suh."

Joe studied the distant white speck through the binoculars.

"Hit's makin' for us, all right," he muttered. "Hit must 'a come fum Biloxi. Hit sho do look familiar, too."

"Well, what's that got to do with uncorking a few drinks of liquor?" demanded Dave Colt, sharply.

"Nothin', Boss," replied Wall-Eye, slowly, "cep'n—cep'n hit mought be er—er—"

"What?" yelled the others, in chorus.

"Hit mought be one o' dem po-lice boats!"

Pearsall, who had restored his artificial limb to its wonted location, looked genuinely sick.

"Might have known it!" he moaned. "Might have known it! The only reason I didn't drown last night was that I was born to be sent to the penitentiary for bootlegging. I need a drink now, too. Honest I do, boys."

Dave Colt had reached the end of his patience.

"Open that case, you fool nigger," he shouted. "Give us a drink."

But Joe kept the glasses glued to the rapidly enlarging speck of white off to starboard.

"Dat's what hit is, Boss!" he said excitedly. "Hit's a po-lice boat. I knows her lines!"

"Crank the engine, Joe," returned Thacker, curtly. "We'll run away from her."

Joe cranked the engine, with never a spark of result.

"Hit's dead an' buried, Boss. And de wind ain't 'mountin', either."

Thacker tacked sharply over to port, but the Wampus Cat sailed listlessly. The white motor boat that was following veered her course, and bore down directly toward the sloop. They could see the foam mounting up her bows.

"It's all off, boys," gloomed Thacker. "Throw the liquor overboard, Joe. It's the only thing we can do."

Wall-Eye Joe looked longingly at the precious freight he was to bury at sea—a cask of beer practically untouched, and a dozen quarts of ten-year-old whiskey.

"This is awful, boys," choked Dave. "Ain't there some way we can save just a drink, Thacker? I'm all ch-chilled up!"

The pursuing motorboat had crept rapidly upon the Wampus Cat, and was scarcely six hundreds yards distant.

"Quick!" ordered Thacker. "We've got no time to lose."

Two melancholy plumps in the water, and it was over. There was no benediction.

The speedy white launch chugged down upon them, and they could see a gesticulating figure at the bow.

"Ahoy the Wampus Cat," shouted the motor-boatman.

"Ahoy yourself, damn it," yelled Thacker. "Say, fellows, there's something familiar about—"

"Why the devil can't you fellows hold on a minute?" the man who hailed them was shouting. "We've chased you twenty miles for a drink!"

"Jumping Jehovah Miss Agnes!" screamed Dave Colt. "Where the devil did *he* come from? It's Char—"

"Damned 'fit ain't," said Thacker, with a sickly grin. "It's Charley Tinman! Who in hell ever told that nigger it was a police boat?"

THE SERPENT BOWL

By MARY D. FOWLER

A man returns to his boyhood home to regain his health, but he is hampered by the burden of responsibility for a boyhood tragedy, made freshly vivid by the old environment.

IT is called the Serpent Bowl by the people in the vicinity because in the very center of the bowl-like depression is a stagnant lake defiled with stringy black water snakes. They cluster thickly around the edge in a waving fringe, like black hair just under water. Their heads are toward the shore, half-embedded in a spongy green scum, and their tails and bodies move incessantly, almost in rhythm. On the gradually rising slope of the bowl stands a forlorn, abandoned old house, almost covered with a climbing cream-yellow rose, and topped with a square tower like the pilot house on a river steamer.

In front of the house is an oval plot covered with patches of Bermuda grass, each patch extending long snaky runners in all directions, like an octopus at rest. Bordering the oval, about fifty feet apart, are crumbling statues, discolored by their protruding iron frameworks. In summer a blanket of mosquitos lies across the lake.

Ten yards from the margin the ground is still soggy, and farther on, old, soft logs lie crumbling into the earth. Behind the house is a semicircular line of tall, moaning, eucalyptus trees.

This was the first night Ormiston Reith and his wife were to spend in the old homestead. At Pauline's direction he had already hacked away the cream-yellow rose vine which obscured the bedroom windows, and Pauline had unpacked a trunk of linen and made the beds, and carefully dusted the dark, carved furniture.

Ormiston had asked to come to his old home when the Doctor prescribed a long rest for his frayed nerves, and Pauline adapted herself easily to his whim, firmly resolved to bring him back to a state of health.

She dreaded their stay in his gloomy childhood home with its leprous gray paint. He had told her but little about it, and that was when they were first married. His cage of baby monkeys had interested her, but she shuddered when he told her how he used to braid three water-snakes together.

And he told her of his lovely frail mother, who spent so much of her time writing at the carved old escritoire. His playroom had been at the top of the house in the square tower. He used to barricade the narrow winding stairs leading up to it with an entanglement of clothesline stretched criss-cross.

"But what did you do up there?" asked Pauline.

"Oh, I would compound the most mysterious essences," he said carelessly, with a laugh. "I had a little alcohol lamp, and I used to boil down geranium leaves and that green scum on the lake. I put snake blood in that one. And I would mix axle grease and melted peppermint candy. You see, I started young, Pauline."

Ormiston Reith was a well known chemist and had married Pauline three months after meeting her at a theatre party. They had been married five years now, and lived in a dear little rambling home on the very corner of an immense golf course belonging to a prosperous country club.

Pauline tried to keep her intense husband out of his smelly laboratory as much as possible, and dutifully inveigled him into golf about twice a week. But a gradual nervous breakdown gave proof that her efforts had been in vain.

When Ormiston had said he wanted to

go to his boyhood home the doctor advised Pauline not to oppose him.

"Better give him his own way," he said. "He's pretty far gone."

So with three trunks and a Chinese cook they came to the hideous Serpent Bowl, and as they walked through the grounds that first afternoon Pauline's heart chilled. One of the statues had a horrid thick limb of a rose tree growing around its neck. Ormiston exclaimed when he saw it:

"Why, I did that years ago when the limb was a mere shoot! I wondered at the time if it would stay that way and grow larger. What a curious effect it gives!"

"Yes; as if she were being strangled," said Pauline, shuddering.

As they went into the house she cut a few of the yellow roses and arranged them in a bowl on the table.

"I remember that scent well," said Ormiston, stooping over them, his eyes glittering.

"Isn't it queer, Ormiston? Bitter-sweet, I should call it. But I rather like it, I think." She pinned one on her blouse.

They spent the evening looking through the library, which contained some really good books.

"Here's Poe," said Ormiston from a dusky corner. "I had read them all before I was ten. Simply fed on them." He replaced the books and stood at the window, gazing out for a long time, his hands clasped behind him. Pauline grew fidgety. When he turned, his staring eyes were glistening strangely.

"Well, I think I'll have a look at my playroom," he announced. "I'm going to spend a great deal of time there."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Pauline tentatively.

"Please, no. Never go there."

Pauline assented indifferently, wondering at his childish intensity.

Next morning Pauline noticed a peculiar, sickening odor, and discovered it to be the rose which had wilted on her blouse. She threw it out the window. Downstairs she found the same thing. The roses in the bowl on the table had withered, and gave forth a disagreeable, sour smell. She could not understand why they had died over night. All day the odor annoyed her, and she threw open the windows, and later hung her blouse out to air. She could not escape it, even outside, and early in the afternoon she set Ah Sim, the cook, to work upon the climbing bush, and kept him sawing and pulling and tearing at it until it was all on the ground in a tangled, odorous mound. The next day Ah Sim made repeated trips to the snaky lake, his wheelbarrow piled high with twisting rose branches. The removal of the rose vine left a dark, sinister patch on the house, with snaky paths reaching out and encircling the windows.

Ormiston smiled oddly. "It used to bother my mother, too," he said, "but she never thought of cutting it down." He laughed loudly. The sound of it filled Pauline with fright. "She never thought of cutting things down," he went on. "She wouldn't even cut the weeds down when they grew in the grass. She never even thought to cut down that clump of trees over there." He jerked his head toward a large space covered with trees so thickly grown together that it seemed impossible for any one to pass through them. They were old and dusty, and the spaces between them were filled with yellow papers and dead twigs and grasses which had been blown there by the wind.

"Mother always complained that the patch of trees was unsightly; yet she never thought to cut it down. She never did." He nodded and nodded, like an amateur actor trying to characterize a foolish old man.

Pauline became panic-stricken. "Ormiston!" she cried, throwing her arms about him. "Let's go back home! You'll never get well here. Please, Ormiston dear."

He shook her off impatiently. "Not till I've finished. Then we'll go home, Pauline. Be patient."

"Finished what, Ormiston?"

"My work, dear. Go away. Please go away. I'm going up to the playroom now."

Left alone, Pauline sobbed in terror. Later she sat at Mrs. Reith's old escritoire and wrote a letter to Doctor Elliot, beseeching him to come. Her subconscious thought emerged in the postscript: "I'm

not sure he's even sane, Doctor. Come and help me get him home."

But Ormiston was so gay and sweet at dinner, although he ate almost nothing, that Pauline's fears lessened, and her heart swelled with relief. He chose to ignore his peculiar actions of the afternoon. They walked together in the doleful garden, which even the red sunset could not color warmly.

"Those are Indian paint brushes," said Ormiston, indicating a cluster of brick-red, bloody-looking wild flowers growing in clumps here and there. Pauline wondered why all the flowers had such odd coloring and odors. She felt that if she should plant some pansies they would come up all black and withered. Violets would probably appear covered with green scum, and she was sure one couldn't raise any vegetables except mushrooms. She hated the place, and longed achingly for her sunny home, but suddenly knew that the rolling, green golf course would always remind her of the floor of scum on the snake-fringed lake. They walked single-file up a path bordered with hedges which had almost grown together. The path led to two graves, those of Ormiston's father and mother. He told Pauline about them.

"Father died of apoplexy—and Mother died of grief," he said in a shaking voice. Suddenly he threw himself on her grave and sobbed frantically, clawing the earth, and panting for breath. Pauline clutched his sleeve.

"Go away, Pauline! Go away!" he cried, and she fled back to the house and crawled miserably up the hollowed stairs to her bedroom.

Next morning Ormiston apologized painstakingly. "I loved Mother very much," he explained.

Pauline kissed him and tried to tempt him with hot coffee and eggs and bacon; but he merely tasted things and left immediately for the playroom.

In the afternoon, when Ah Sim came trudging back from the market and the post office, he handed Pauline a letter with an unfamiliar postmark. It was addressed to her, and on opening it she read:

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Reith,

I send you the announcement of the death of Dr. Arnold Reith. As you probably remember, Mrs. Arnold Reith, my sister, died three years ago when her little son was born. This leaves Arnold, Jr. an orphan, and I am unable to take him into my home, as I have five little ones of my own. Would it be possible for you to take him? He is a dear little boy, and greatly resembles a picture of Ormiston Reith as a child, which Dr. Arnold has among his papers. I understand you have no children; and so I feel sure you will welcome little Arnold. His father has left him well provided for.

I close with the deepest sympathy to Ormiston Reith for the loss of his Uncle Arnold.

Yours faithfully,
Mrs. Arthur Benson"

Pauline read the letter twice carefully. So, Ormiston's uncle had left a little boy! Her childless heart leaped with joy. Ormiston had never mentioned the child. She must show the letter to him!

For the first time she went up the winding stairway to Ormiston's playroom and knocked timidly on the door. He did not answer. She tried the rusty lock, succeeded with an effort in opening the door, entered, and looked about wonderingly. Ormiston was not there. An alcohol lamp was in the middle of the floor with a battered tin mug on it. In the corner was a cupboard of shelves containing rows of dusty labelled bottles and jars. She examined them inquisitively, smiling tenderly as she saw the childish handwriting and realized that these were the early concoctions he had spoken of: "Frog Mixture," "Snake-blood Ointment," "Spirits of Geranium," "Ground-up Bones." What a precocious child he had been! And what gruesome pursuits he had followed! She noticed a clean, new-looking bottle on the top shelf, and took it down. "Elixir of Life," the label read. It was filled with a greenish mixture—probably scum from the lake, she thought with amusement. Then she started violently, and the bottle slipped from her hands to the floor and broke. She had suddenly realized that the label was written in his adult hand!

As she backed to the door, her brain whirling and her eyes blurred with the horror of her thoughts, she heard Ormiston panting up the stairs. She shrank into a corner as he came into the room. His clothes were torn and his cheeks had long, bleeding scratches on them. In his hands was a ball of crumpled newspaper. His face was radiant. He came in eagerly, knelt carefully, opened up the paper, and smoothed it on the floor. In the center was a pile of little bones and sticks and earth. Pauline watched dazedly. With a quick, alert movement he went to the cupboard of shelves, then turned with a face terrible to see.

"Ormiston!" hoarsely cried Pauline.

"Where is it? Where is the elixir? Where is the elixir?"

"On the floor, dear. See? I spilt it." Love had overcome her terror.

Ormiston scooped up the slimy mixture in his hands and poured it on the bones and sticks.

He held out his arms to Pauline and she went to him, hypnotized. He was transfigured.

"See, Pauline," he whispered happily. "That's my little brother Leslie. I'll leave him here for two weeks and then he'll come to life. I invented the elixir. Dear little Leslie! He'll come to life. He'll never know the difference. He'll never know I killed him."

"You *killed* him?" she asked in a precise, dull voice.

"Yes. He tripped over my foot and his head struck a rock. I hid him in the trees and never told. Father would have killed *me*. Mother never thought to cut the trees down. She never thought of it! They finally decided he had been kidnapped. But I knew better—yes. Dear little brother. You'll come to life—only two weeks now. Then I'll ride you in a wheelbarrow." Tears were streaming down his face and he leaned shakily on Pauline.

She supported him to the door.

"We'll go town stairs now, Ormiston. You must rest while you wait," she said, in a dream. She helped him downstairs and put him to bed like a little baby. With his head sunk in the soft pillow he turned his beautiful, dark eyes to her and whispered, "Only two weeks, Pauline."

"Yes," she nodded. "Did little Leslie look like you?"

"Very much. Some thought we were twins. But he was a year younger. He was four and I was five." His voice grew indistinct and he fell asleep, his long, brown fingers holding tightly to Pauline's hand. Gradually they relaxed and she tiptoed out of the room, stifling her sobs as best she could.

All that night she paced the floor of her room, and from the depths of her wretchedness she at last evolved a plan. She stole downstairs, and by the dim light of a flickering candle wrote a note to Mrs. Arthur Benson.

For two days Ormiston slept and could not be roused. Then he woke suddenly and started out of bed.

"The two weeks aren't up yet, are they?" he cried in horror.

"No, dearest, no!" she soothed him. "Only two days, dearest." And he plunged back on his pillow, tossing in delirium.

That night Doctor Elliot arrived, and Pauline sobbed nervously on his fatherly shoulder and told him the story in disconnected little horror-stricken sentences.

He closeted himself with Ormiston. In terrified anxiety Pauline wandered about the dreadful house. She could still smell the ghosts of sour roses about the rooms. Ah Sim offered her some broth, but she gazed at him unseeingly. The man she loved—her husband—was raving crazily in that upstairs room. The blood would rush to her head in a warm wave, then recede, leaving her icy. How long could she endure? She would rather have him die now than live with a diseased brain.

When she heard Doctor Elliot's footsteps, she flew upstairs to him. His face confirmed her fears. He was pale and perspiration was on his forehead.

"Is he insane?" gasped Pauline.

Doctor Elliot looked at her compassionately, tears welling in his eyes.

"Oh, my dear child, what agony you have made for yourself! No, he is not insane. He is delirious. He must have been delirious for weeks. His temperature has

reached its highest point. He may not live, Mrs. Reith, but he is not insane, and never has been, in the true sense of the word."

Pauline was revived. Fascinated she moved toward Ormiston's door. The doctor commanded her to stop.

"You must not see him for a week, my child. I can't let you. He may be better then."

That night Pauline spent her first night of peaceful sleep in the ghastly house, and woke in the morning full of new, refreshing faith. She trudged into the village and bought a great basket of moss roses and bluebells. If the doctor would only let her in to Ormiston! She could calm him—she knew she could.

When she came back Doctor Elliot was walking in the garden. She slipped into the house unseen and tiptoed to Ormiston's door with her basket of flowers. Within she heard a low, incessant muttering. She opened to door softly and looked in.

Ormiston lay quiet. Only his hands clawed and clawed at the counterpane. His skin was stretched tightly across his face and the eyes were mere glimmering slits. The muttering was unintelligible. It was dreadful. The pain in Pauline's heart was unbearable. Ormiston's shifting eyes traveled over her several times, but he gave no sign of recognition. She shuddered sickly and closed the door on him. Her face was bloodless. Her morning's faith had given place to uneasy dread. Seemingly the only real thing about her was the basket of moss roses, and she clung to it tightly as she went to her bedroom, the scene of so many nights of vigil and fear.

For the next few days time was a blank. Her days were not divided into hours; they were merely a long light-time of waiting. The nights were a long dark-time of waiting. The wise doctor left her alone except at meal time, when he grimly forced her to drink soup and eat eggs.

When Ah Sim brought her a telegram one morning she read it passively without getting its meaning.

"Arnold Reith, Jr. will arrive in care of conductor at four P. M. Tuesday. Meet him." Then it crowded in upon her. The little three-year-old boy was coming—the one she had sent for. Why had she sent for him? She didn't know. Oh, yes! So that Ormiston would think that it was his little Leslie come to life. But what good would that do? Pauline could hardly think coherently. It was all a confusing tangle; but she met little Arnold that afternoon and brought him to the old, old house. He kept up a running fire of questions, and Pauline became more and more normal. She hoped that the doleful place would not oppress the little child.

Next day she listened to his footsteps, pattering over the old floors. She wondered if Ormiston heard. At night the little boy slept with her. Already he loved her.

When she took him outdoors in the afternoon he scampered ahead of her, exclaiming with delight at his new surroundings. He measured himself against the statues to show her how tall he was, and touched the stony fingers of a wood-nymph curiously. He looked up at the head wreathed with marble flowers.

He shouted with joy at the jumping grasshoppers, and chased slow-winged butterflies over the patchy grass, and begged for a ride in the wheelbarrow. He gathered short-stemmed nosegays of the queer wildflowers and gave them, all damp and wilting from his hot, excited little hands, to Pauline. His eyes widened as he peered into the clump of thickly-growing trees as if he saw a fairyland in there.

Ah Sim made him a swing under a gnarled oak branch, and spent his spare time swinging him. Between those two a close friendship had sprung up immediately.

Little Arnold never lacked cookies, and thick gravy, and sweet jam. His coming almost lifted the shadow from the Serpent Bowl. Pauline often found herself looking at the house and the garden and mentally suggesting little artistic improvements which might make the place actually attractive.

She grew more and more impatient to see Ormiston. Doctor Elliot said he was improving slightly. Finally he let her in. She took little Arnold with her. Ormis-

ton's vacant eyes stared unseeingly at her, but brightened when they saw the child.

"Leslie—don't you know me?" he asked in a weak voice. Pauline pushed the boy toward him. Ormiston glanced strangely at her.

"I hope he doesn't realize!" he said. "Do you think he does?"

"Oh, no! Ormiston, dear!" Pauline was thrilled at his recognition of her. "Besides, he only tripped. You yourself might have been the one to trip. It wasn't your fault, Ormiston." She was looking at him intensely, breathless with the effort to force her words into his consciousness. "Say it wasn't your fault, dear!"

"Probably it wasn't. Probably it wasn't. I don't know. Leslie knows. You tell us, Leslie."

"You forget, Ormiston. He doesn't know anything about it. He is only a baby. He wouldn't remember." She spoke patiently and left the room, leaving the two together, little Arnold nestling on the bed, with Ormiston's arm around him.

Pauline sought out Doctor Elliot. "How long will Ormiston be this way?" she asked. Deep within her she felt that the doctor had been deceiving her.

"He is weak now, my child. He will strengthen, and as his body strengthens his mind will also." Pauline leaned against the wall fighting her unbelief. To drift on in this way much longer seemed impossible.

Ormiston's convalescence lengthened into weeks. His face was no longer muddy brown. Every day Pauline sat with him while he told stories to Arnold, whom he still called Leslie. The affection between the two had deepened every day.

To-day, as the three sat together, Pauline noticed every detail—the thin shoulders showing under the blanket in which he was wrapped as he sat in a great, shabby, chintz-covered chair; the still hands which once had been so nervous; the relaxed attitude of weakness. They were sitting before a large mirror which reached to the floor. Arnold's toys were lined up on the marble shelf at the bottom of it. He was on Ormiston's lap, playing with a curious ring on the emaciated hand. Ormiston gazed dreamily into the mirror where the trio were reflected. He looked for a long time, growing more still, more concentrated.

"Pauline."

"Yes, Ormiston?"

"Who is this boy?"

Pauline could not answer at once. She listened to the grandfather clock ticking in the hall. He heart was thumping heavily. Finally she pulled herself together and took Ormiston's hand.

"It is your uncle's little boy," she carefully said. "His name is Arnold, Jr. Doctor Arnold Reith is dead, and the little boy was sent to us. He is our own little boy now—our little son." She caressed Arnold's thick curls.

Ormiston hugged the boy close. He made no comment on his uncle's death. He had barely known Doctor Arnold. With tired, happy eyes he smiled at Pauline.

"We must take our son away from this damp, gloomy place, back home to the sun. It is not good for him here, Pauline. Will you call me Daddy, little Arnold?"

"Oh, Ormiston! Ormiston! You are well!" cried Pauline, tears running down her cheeks.

"Yes, Pauline. I want to go back home as soon as possible. This place is not good for me, either." He glanced out the window toward the patch of dusty interwoven trees. Pauline followed his look.

"You will try not to think of that any more?" she begged.

"It won't bother me, Pauline. I am strong. Arnold will take his place. It wasn't my fault, of course; but it was a terrible secret for a boy to grow up with, especially in this environment. When we get home with little Arnold, it will fall into the background of my consciousness, as it had done before I was taken sick. Now that you know, it isn't so dreadful. You and little Arnold will help me keep things in their proper relation. I am not afraid of myself, dear, and I don't want you to fear for me."

"I'm not afraid, Ormiston. Oh! I am so happy!" She knew that she and little Arnold together could pull him up and keep him well.

A PHILISTINE IN ARCADY

By ELLIOT FIELD

J. Vincent Lafarge, Ph.D., takes his wife to a meeting of the Arcadian Literary Fellowship.

HENEVER Betty Lafarge cried there usually was a reason. On this particular winter evening tears did double duty; they not only evidenced Betty's lonesomeness at being left to her needles and her cat in the tidy little home which at that moment seemed awfully haunted by dreary, creepy silences, but they likewise expressed her violent reaction against the suspicion that had at last become a certainty when she accidently came upon the photograph hidden within the pages of the gold-embossed program of Pendleton's premier organization, the Arcadian Literary Fellowship. Manifestly Dame Art was not the only siren to entice her husband from his fireside o' nights.

J. Vincent Lafarge, Ph.D., all around literary connoisseur and author of several books on recondite subjects, considered that his real estate business, to which necessity drove him during the long hours of the day, existed merely as a means to underwrite his more cultured pursuits. He devoutly believed—at least he persuaded himself he believed—that all mundane affairs, even home and wife, were ordained to minister to the high purposes of the Great Uplift. The Arcadian Society was the supreme relationship of his life. The gall in the cup was his conviction that his practical, stay-at-home little wife was not fitted to breathe the surcharged atmosphere of that exclusive organization whose membership comprised the literati of the town, including a poet with name and fame already luminous in the world of arts and letters.

To be classed as a dunce puts one quite outside the pale of argument, so whenever her husband aired his views on these matters Betty riveted her eyes on her sewing or sighed into her spoon at meals. J. Vincent judiciously omitted from such homilies certain details which he feared she might not view in their proper light. Not that he considered her inclined to jealousy; he put it to himself more gracefully—it was a question of temperament. But the members of the Arcadian fellowship, being mere mortals and therefore possessed of a due inheritance of the frailties of the flesh, were at times given to artless gossip, and hence it finally came to Betty's ears through the sympathetic recital of alleged friends that the names of J. Vincent Lafarge and Mrs. Evelyn M. Warrington, a comely widow whose social station was stoutly buttressed with well filled bags of gold, were being bracketed quite frequently in the doings of the literary elite.

Hitherto Betty's dislike of the Arcadian Fellowship for the place it held in her husband's affections had been entirely impersonal, but when the menacing Mrs. Warrington flitted across the horizon the feminine in Betty awoke to the possible danger. The Fellowship was no longer a nebula of higher culture, a shadow land of inaccessible learning into which her J. Vincent vanished every Friday evening to return, so she had consoled herself, with his aesthetic nature refreshed by deep draughts at the founts of wisdom; it became a terrain lurid with suspicion, a labyrinth infested with vulturish creatures who hid their fell intent on the innocency of J. Vincent under the mask of a common devotion to art and literature. The Arcadian Literary Fellowship was now incarnate in Mrs. Warrington.

Having sketched the background let us

return to Betty in tears. Crying is frequently an intermediate state between feeling and action. Very soon another Betty, dry eyed and thunder browed, leaned her elbows on the study table and cupped her chin in her hands while she meditated on the question of what to do about it. It was quite clear that if J. Vincent were to be saved from such a pitfall of matrimonial impropriety, it must be done without tears and stormy recriminations. Men hate scenes.

Suddenly the Plan dawned. Its formative principle was to meet J. Vincent on his own ground and slay the Dragon with her own poison. Like cures like or kills it or something along that line, she urged to herself. There remained the working out of the practical details, the application of the Formative Principle to the problem at hand, a problem of the inevitable triangle where two sides must, by assumption, be considered equal. In whimsical confusion of her mathematical memories she decided that by the time she was ready to write Q. E. D., this particular triangle would be reduced to two parallel lines free from bothersome angles.

Another glance at the program revealed the prophecy that on the following Friday evening Mrs. Warrington would read a paper on "Pre-Homeric Poetry," unfamiliar enough ground for poor Betty, whose organized knowledge of poetry was largely between the covers of a gift edition of "Heart Throbs." All she could recall of Homer were vagrant snatches of classic incident and quotation which swam in a dreamy aureole around the marble head of the statue bust in the town library. Nothing daunted she cuddled up in the big arm chair before the friendly fire and spent a thoughtful hour planning her Philistinian raid on the habitants of Arcady. When, long after midnight, J. Vincent leaned over the chair to give her a half repentant kiss, he found her sound asleep with an odd little smile hovering about the corners of her mouth.

The intervening week was like all other weeks. J. Vincent was away from home every evening. Betty was too tactful to ask where he was spending his time. She pictured him in the classic section of the town library or perhaps—and at this point in her cogitations she invariably pursed her lips sharply—he might be conning the pages of some ponderous volume, tête-à-tête, in the mellow glow of Mrs. Warrington's parlor lamp. She was quite sure that the light was very, very mellow and that Mrs. Warrington, in her role of vampire, was wearing a shimmering gown of some seductive design.

Meanwhile, in her odd moments, Betty was busy with the Plan. There was a book on Homeric poetry by the study table and a thesaurus of things Homeric on a nearby shelf; besides, the town library itself was only five minutes walk. If the dawning of Friday meant anything different than the coming of any other day she did not betray the fact to J. Vincent. When Betty, dawdling over the dessert that closed a promptly served and unusually tasty dinner, inquired casually the topic for the evening and whether she might vary the monotony of her humdrum life by going with him to the meeting, J. Vincent lifted his eyebrows in genuine surprise. That she should express a desire to visit the Arcadian Fellowship was decidedly novel.

"My dear, you amaze me!" was his well ordered reply. "Why this sudden interest in the affairs of our Fellowship? I never supposed you cared for that sort of thing."

"You've never asked me," she retorted. "Does a person have to talk Greek to enjoy 'that sort of thing?'"

"It requires a sound scholastic foundation," he replied with unconcious pomposity. "One must have an unusual appreciation of literary values, a wide acquaintance with the masters of learning and a vital—"

"Why don't you say I haven't brains enough and be done with it?" she interrupted tartly.

"Tut! tut! little one, don't be angry. I didn't mean to—"

"Don't 'tut! tut!' me and stop acting so superior," she insisted, leaning her elbows on the table and surveying her lord and master with undisguised vexation. "If I'm good enough to cook your meals and mend your clothes and share your honor-

able name, I'm good enough to be exhibited in public once in a while."

"Why Betty!" he gasped, dropping his spoon on his plate. He carefully wiped the corners of his mouth with his napkin and stared at his wife's flushed face, conjecturing with scarcely hidden uneasiness what this unexpected outburst might portend.

"Yes, I know," she continued vehemently, "I'm acting like a little rebel and I am one. I'ts just dishes and mops and sewing all the time. How would you like to spend your evenings inside these four walls with only the cat and the clock and the maid for company? And—"

"The children," J. Vincent cut in.

"Asleep in their cribs, where they belong," she flung back. "You've always got your head in a lot of musty books with impossible titles or you're gadding off to rub noses with super-men and women who mince in highbrow phrases and submerge their intellectual poverty in a torrent of adjectives. I'll wager that most of them don't know any more about 'art' and 'literature' than I do."

J. Vincent, albeit he wore a properly shocked expression, was secretly pleased at Betty's capable if caustic vocabulary; his sense of humor detected the resemblance to reality in her ironic characterization of the members of the Arcadian Fellowship. He slowly brushed back the well trained black locks that massed so becomingly across his forehead and peered intently at his wife, deliberating the chances of her perpetrating some literary indiscretion in the company of his intellectuals. There was a further objection to her going, one that in the nature of the case he could not mention. His evening of companionship with Mrs. Warrington was to be preluded by a little ride in the handsome widow's electric, and here was Betty unsuspectingly marring this carefully arranged plan. Or was it unsuspecting? What had she been hearing? His eyebrows narrowed a trifle as he drummed his fingers on the table cloth.

"Well?" The lilt in her voice was most expressive.

He was cornered, of course. Since a direct refusal was clearly out of the question, he found solace in the reflection that the presence of his wife would throw the mantle of respectability over his relations with Mrs. Warrington. That at least would be some salvage from the wreck of the evening.

"I suppose we can take the risk." His forced smile was not at all convincing, even to himself.

"So you consider it a risk!" She gazed at him appraisingly. "Am I as boorish and uncouth as all that? Or simply uneducated?"

"My dear, there are some things you don't seem to understand. The Arcadian Fellowship is a most unusual and exclusive organization. As my wife you have, of course, a perfect—er—social right to attend. But it is expected that every one will be fitted to contribute to the topic under discussion and my hesitation was due to my desire not to have you placed in a false position."

"Oh, yes, the topic! What did you say the topic is?" Betty asked innocently, busying herself with clearing the table of dishes.

"Pre-Homeric Poetry, a subject on which very few are competent to speak with authority. Have you—er—ever read anything along that line?" he inquired with unctuous condescension.

"Goodness! *I* don't have to do any talking, do I?" she countered. Her prettily assumed alarm raised J. Vincent's hope that she still might be frightened out of her notion of going with him.

"Well," he drawled, "that depends. If Mrs. Warrington should call on you for any remarks you certainly would be expected to respond."

"And what has Mrs. Warrington to do with it?" She flipped a glance at him as she leaned over to brush the crumbs off the table.

"She is the reader of the evening. A most accomplished woman. She will be most happy to make your acquaintance."

"That is very sweet of Mrs. Warrington," said Betty dryly. "I have always wanted to meet that woman."

J. Vincent looked up quickly from the

business of folding his napkin, but Betty's back was turned.

"Then you have—er—quite decided to go with me to-night?" he asked, squirming uneasily in his chair.

"Quite! I simply cannot refuse your invitation," she returned. "You know, J. Vincent, when you urge anything you are simply irresistible."

He eyed her doubtfully during the ensuing pause which she filled in with the humming of a tune as she flitted here and there, putting the finishing touches to the re-setting of the table with clean dishes and silver against Saturday's breakfast.

"By the way," he hesitated, "Mrs. Warrington will call for me—er—us in her electric."

"How very thoughtful of her!" commented Betty in a velvet voice. "You admire Mrs. Warrington exceedingly, don't you?"

"Betty!" said J. Vincent, rising stiffly. "You have just three quarters of an hour in which to dress." He strode out of the room with head erect and shoulders squared, in manner befitting an Arcadian.

But Betty was too clever a strategist to leave any icicles unthawed. In an instant she was after him.

"You are a dear!" she vociferated, throwing her arms about his neck and smothering him with kisses, "to bother yourself with little, uneducated me! But I'll promise not to disgrace you, you see!" And she ran quickly up the winding hall stairs, pausing at the landing to throw back a kiss.

Within the recesses of the library J. Vincent bent over his study desk, his gaze alternating between two photographs. The one taken from its place on the mantle was the picture of a smiling, curly haired girl of nineteen in wedding dress of a decade ago. The other, which he had guiltily withdrawn from the pages of a souvenir program hidden beneath littered books and papers, showed a grandiloquently posed woman of forty-plus holding a half opened volume in her bejeweled fingers. Presently he came slowly upstairs to dress.

"Will I do, Vincent?"

Betty surveyed herself in the glass and turned inquiringly to her husband. She seemed perfect, from the yellow rose in her hair—a tribute to the aesthetic requirements of the occasion—down to the tips of her new satin shoes, but she could not feel sure of herself until J. Vincent had passed judgment. She had spent many eager hours planning her costume for she had readily divined that if she was to score a social triumph in the presence of the Arcadian autocracy she must more than hold her own with the wives of the other elect. J. Vincent frequently had told her that the Fellowship, who never encouraged tousled genius, held firmly as one article of their creed that truth was to be found in beauty. So she pirouetted before the mirror and anxiously awaited her lord's comment.

"You look perfectly stunning, my dear," he said with a smile as he eyed her critically. She presented a most charming picture and even though she might not be able to speak the dialect of the literati he hoped to succeed in masking her mental disabilities. To this end he proceeded to deliver a monologue on the habits and customs of the Arcadians to which she listened in dutiful silence, save for an occasional monosyllabic assent to his admonitions.

An electric drew up at the curb. Mrs. Warrington, peering expectantly between the mohair velvet curtains, bit her lip with vexation when she saw two figures instead of one come down the path. Her proprietary "Good evening, Vincent!" had an edge of subtle inquiry that did not escape Betty.

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Lafarge," she purred, acknowledging J. Vincent's somewhat embarrassed introduction by extending a limp hand. "So good of you to come! Now, Vincent, regarding the theory of—" and she plunged immediately into one of the disputed questions of Homeric authorship which she and J. Vincent had been discussing the previous evening, completely ignoring Betty whom she evidently considered a negligible factor in an argument of such literary import. Betty was more amused than piqued. It gave her an excellent opportunity to make a

preliminary appraisal of her rival and to calculate her own subsequent moves in the little game of hearts. Not until the electric stopped in front of the Fellowship Club House did Mrs. Warrington condescend a remark in her direction.

"It is too bad, Mrs. Lafarge, that we have had to discuss matters of so little interest to you. I hope you will enjoy your evening with us at the Fellowship. The door, Vincent! Be careful of the icy step, my dear Mrs. Lafarge! Vincent, your arm please!" She followed Betty very slowly, leaning so heavily on J. Vincent that he nearly lost his footing on the slippery pavement.

Arcady, in modern dress, was at its best. The electric lamps, artfully hidden behind the curved molding which crowned the expanse of gray-green wall arabesqued in gold and bronze, shed a soft glow that mellowed the tints of oriental rug, damask portiere and fluted ceiling in a blend of satisfying color. From behind a bower of natural palms in a little corner fronting the main entrance violin, cello and piano dispensed classic music with an admirable modulation that served to stimulate and not to submerge the conversation of exquisite ladies and ultra-immaculate gentlemen whose every utterance, heard from the near distance of the doorway, seemed to sparkle with the brilliancy of meditated wit and wisdom.

Betty, fearful of her ability to meet the exactions of such a galaxy of learning and a bit frightened now that she was actually in the promised land, shrank back timidly at the first few introductions; but when nothing more formidable than the weather, and the recent invasion of a popular dramatic star was thrust at her she regained her self-confidence and unloosed her tongue in good natured raillery at several middle-aged gallants whose instant devotion at her shrine made it evident that she was a person of potential importance. J. Vincent, looking up from his pre-meeting consultation with Mrs. Warrington on the tête-à-tête divan, began to nourish a secret pique at his wife's independence. He had expected her to act the clinging vine, to worship him in the glories of his literary kingdom, and here she was absorbing so much attention that even Mrs. Warrington paused in the middle of a ponderous phrase to remark, somewhat tartly as J. Vincent subconsciously realized, that Mrs. Lafarge was evidently quite a favorite with the men.

Between gay passages with her admirers Betty had been studying Mrs. Warrington and had decided that however little of a Lothario her J. Vincent might prove to be the widow could certainly qualify as a vampire.

"Good looking but flashy," she said to herself. "That green velvet gown is over modish and a trifle low cut. That figure would hardly stand the test of morning deshabille. That chin shows selfishness. That mouth is weak—and cruel, I'm sure. Those eyes—for all the world like a big cat's. She must have claws the way she—oh, you mustn't!" Betty exclaimed aloud, for Mrs. Warrington, noticing that Betty was watching her, purposely laid her arm across the high back of the divan so that her hand rested on J. Vincent's shoulder.

"I beg your pardon," someone at Betty's side was saying, "I didn't mean to offend."

Arthur Hatch, the rising young poet of Pendleton, was murmuring apologies. Then Betty remembered, in a confused flash-back, that this most attentive of her new acquaintances had been quoting some of his own love verses.

"I didn't mean you, I was just—er—thinking—" she began and stopped abruptly for her tell-tale gaze had turned her companion's eyes in the direction of the divan. He smiled comprehendingly and shrugged his shoulders.

"A charming couple, aren't they?" he ventured. "We call them the Homeric affinities."

"'The Homeric affinities?'" echoed Betty vaguely. "Is it the custom here to—er—have an affinity?"

"Quite!" said Hatch. "No Arcadian is complete without one. It adds piquancy to our relationships."

"Indeed!" was all that Betty could think of saying.

"And why not?" Hatch continued. "Life is commonplace enough as it is. Why

should we, who of all mortals are free to realize our true endowments, be restricted by the narrowness of a world of absurd conventions. Take myself, for instance."

"Yes?" replied Betty negatively, still watching the scene on the divan.

"Or yourself!" Hatch's dark eyes were fastened on her in a look that was meant to convey an invitation to further intimacy. She gave him a sweeping glance—she had hardly noted his appearance before—and made the following entry in her book of mental reference: "Arthur Hatch, alleged poet, looks like a pug dog." Then, sensing that J. Vincent was gazing in their direction, she touched Hatch's arm with her fan and said with the divinest of smiles:

"Tell me, Mr. Hatch, how soon does the meeting begin?"

But J. Vincent, who was not an expert in lip reading, was sure that she had said: "Arthur dear, I think your poetry is simply wonderful!"

"Look at Arthur Hatch and your wife," snapped Mrs. Warrington, realizing that J. Vincent's interest in Homer had dropped considerably below par. "They seem quite enamored of each other, don't they?"

At J. Vincent's annoyed frown Mrs. Warrington smoothed out her voice and shifted her attack. "*We* understand one another, don't we, Vincent?" He made no reply, but continued staring across the room. She lowered her head close to his and breathed caressingly: "Tell me, Vinvent dear, how much *do* you really think of me?"

His startled expression showed Mrs. Warrington that she had made a tactical blunder, but before she could recover the situation Mrs. Vandersall, the hostess of the evening, approached with a smiling request for her to come forward and occupy the reader's chair on the circular dais at the far end of the room. J. Vincent, now affinity free, stalked over to Betty, his eyes boring gimlet holes through the assiduous Hatch. Betty expected that the poet would apologetically withdraw or at least trim his speech to the occasion; but Hatch merely nodded casually to J. Vincent and continued to quote copiously from the storehouse of his most amorous verse. Quite evidently he assumed that a mere husband had no more claim to his wife's company than any other Arcadian.

J. Vincent thrust his hands in his pockets and turned on his heel. Betty's first impulse was to make her excuses and follow him to his seat on the front row beside the dais, but she remembered the Plan and renewed her animated conversation with the enraptured Hatch, knowing quite well that J. Vincent had turned his chair half way around and was watching them.

The solemn tones of the Buddha gong, announcing the beginning of the program, reduced the poet to temporary impotence. Betty accepted the chair that Hatch eagerly pushed toward her and looked covertly at J. Vincent who was sitting with folded arms staring moodily at the floor. When Mrs. Warrington, from her station at the Arcadian high altar, leaned over and touched him playfully on the shoulder with her manuscript roll and received a mere abstracted nod in response, Betty turned and beamed triumphantly on Arthur Hatch. That misguided individual, interpreting her smile in the light of his egotism, moved his chair closer and murmured: "My dear, you are simply radiant tonight!"

"I have a right to be," was her soft reply. "I am radiantly happy."

The paper on Homeric Poetry, a semi-lucid attempt to track the mythic poet back to his primal haunts and to adduce some original theories of authorship, although bristling with wordy adjectives, well worn phrases and borrowed epigram was written in a racy, pithy style reminiscent of Dr. Lafarge and had the negative virtue of reasonable length. Betty's thought oscillated between the theme and the insinuating personality of the reader. With a hostile curiosity inevitable under the circumstances she kept asking herself: "What does Vincent see in that woman, anyhow?" always adding the pathetic little question which, like an insistent wraith, refused to be laid: "Does he really care for her?" J. Vincent, his gaze fixed on Mrs. Warrington and his face stolid and uncommunicative, supplied but half an answer.

Betty joined in the perfunctory applause that greeted Mrs. Warrington's flourishing conclusion and sat silent during the aftermath of buzzing comment, skillfully sidetracking the garrulous Hatch by a pretended absorption in some pencilled notes on the back of her program. Her mind was fully occupied with the part she hoped she soon would be called upon to play. There were some questions from the floor to which Mrs. Warrington gave cleverly evasive answers, and a few of the members, at Mrs. Warrington's request, made brief contributions which showed an encouraging ignorance of the whole subject, invariably covering their retreat by a fulsome laudation of the paper and its accomplished authoress. It may have been due to Betty's overwrought suspicion, but she was sure Mrs. Warrington was regarding her with the look that the cat might give the canary when the cage door is thrown open.

Then it happened. Mrs. Warrington arose and announced that they had with them a visitor who, as the wife of their talented fellow member, must have something to say on the topic.

"Mrs. Lafarge," she said with tigerish sweetness, "you surely have a gem for us out of the wealth of your information. Come, we won't listen to a refusal."

J. Vincent sat bolt upright and swore softly under his breath. Hadn't he expressly warned Mrs. Warrington that his wife knew nothing about Homeric Poetry? He looked anxiously at Betty expecting her to turn pale and collapse in her chair. Instead, to his amazement, she rose with a smile, bowed graciously to Mrs. Warrington and without a shade of embarrassment started to speak. He caught her opening remarks—a prettily phrased word of thanks for having been given this opportunity to address the Fellowship on a subject in which she was so vitally interested—and then he launched forth on a sea of wonder. Here was his unliterary little Betty whom he never had known to open the pages of any book more serious than the most popular novel, Betty who had always affected to regard his opinion as the ultimate wisdom in matters intellectual, actually regaling the elect Arcadian Literary Fellowship! And they were listening, too, with a rapt attention they seldom accorded one of their own number, their faces evidencing their delight at the charming discourse being delivered by the wife of "their talented fellow member." It was incredible, astounding! Whence had she this learning?

He looked at Mrs. Warrington. She had settled back in her chair, her fingers nervously twisting the pages of her manuscript, her eyes narrowed to little envious slits. Arthur Hatch sat as if spell bound, drinking in every word. What a picture Betty made, one daintily gloved hand resting on the back of a chair, the other moving to and fro in graceful gestures, her head tilted a little to one side as she spoke fluently and easily with the delightful parenthesis of a smile between her well rounded sentences.

The climax was unforgettable. Ending her speech with a neatly turned period Betty bowed again to Mrs. Warrington and inquired if she might ask a question.

"Certainly, if you wish," replied Mrs. Warrington, stiffening in her chair.

"I have been very much interested in your theories of Homeric authorship, Mrs. Warrington," said Betty with deliberate emphasis. "I would like to know if you consider the writings of the Greek author Adrolos really authentic and if, in your opinion, Andrew Martinus is right when, in his recent work with which your are of course acquainted, he holds that these poems of Adrolos are the poetic precursors of the early Homeric age."

There was an expectant silence. Realizing that her literary prestige was at stake Mrs. Warrington hesitated and coughed into her handkerchief.

"Really, Mrs. Lafarge," she said icily, playing for time, "I hardly understand your question."

Betty repeated it, Mrs. Warrington, her face betraying her unwonted embarrassment, hesitated again and shrugged her shoulders in an attempt at self composure.

"I consider the matter quite unimportant," she finally announced, her voice trembling with suppressed mortification.

She shot a vicious glance at Betty and folded her manuscript preparatory to leaving the platform.

"Thank you!" said Betty demurely, taking her seat. The Arcadians exchanged significant looks. After all, their idol had feet of clay.

During the collation served in the red and gold dining room J. Vincent moved among the throng of Betty's effusive admirers like one in a dream. To Mrs. Vandersall's enthusiastic "Really, Dr. Lafarge, you are most unkind. Where have you been keeping your clever little wife all this time?" he gave a reply which caused that Arcadian to lift her eyebrows and glance quickly around to see if anybody was listening. Then he realized that in some unaccountable manner he had let slip the name of Mrs. Warrington. He bit his lip and turned to his wife.

"Betty," he urged, breaking in unceremoniously on one of Arthur Hatch's low toned remarks, "let's go home!"

"Ready, Vincent!" she replied, placing her hand in his arm and starting toward the cloak room. Then over her shoulder: "Of course, Mr. Hatch, Dr. Lafarge and I will be delighted to have you call any evening."

The servant at the club house entrance shook his head. "Mrs. Warrington left half an hour ago," he vouchsafed, shutting the door to keep back a windy swirl of snow.

J. Vincent gulped nervously. "We can't walk home in all this storm. Perhaps someone will—"

"Allow me to proffer you my machine," edged in the omnipresent Hatch. "It's right on my way!"

J. Vincent started a dignified refusal, but Betty forestalled him with a vivacious: "Indeed, Mr. Hatch, we shall be more than pleased. It is so good of you to come to our rescue!"

When the door of the Lafarge home closed on Hatch's lingering farewell J. Vincent tossed his hat and coat on a chair, stuck his hands in his pockets and kicked viciously at a loose coal that had fallen out in front of the fireplace.

"That man," he said, "gets on my nerves."

Betty, emerging from her furs, gave him a sidelong glance and smiled mischievously. She watched him a moment as he frowned down into the fire.

"Vincent!" She laid her head on his shoulder and looked up at him timidly. "Were you—ashamed of me?"

"Ashamed?" He drew her up and kissed her. "You were wonderful, simply wonderful!"

Silence. "What a fool I've been!"

Another silence. "Betty, tell me! Where did you dig up Andrew Martinus—and that fellow Adrolos? I had never heard of them before."

She nestled closer to him, inwardly breathing a prayer that her confession would not dim the glory of her little feminine triumph.

"Neither had I, Vincent dear, I just—made 'em up!"

IN THE August number: HIGH FINANCE *by Elwood Brown,* a humorous story setting forth the difficulties and rewards of bill collecting.

ON THE BERRY BUSH

By ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

Auntie Miller specializes as an adjuster of family difficulties, but occasionally she lends her moral support in the culture of the budding romance.

AM a firm believer in Heaven-made marriages. You can say what you will about propinquity and geography and affinity and all that. The novelists were not far wrong when they opined, in true, yellow-backed style, that their heroines went forth to meet their fate. It is fate, or, better still, destiny, that brings two hearts together.

When I met Henry, I was looking, to be perfectly frank, for a minister. By the merest chance, I stumbled upon Henry at the home of a mutual friend. I must admit that he was as far from being a minister as is a Skye-terrier. Morever, he was a Democrat and a Methodist, while I was a Presbyterian and a Republican. But—

"There's a divinty that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

The immortal dart struck us both squarely. I firmly believe that our marriage was written in the stars—that it was to be, though there were some who whispered, in charitable asides, that I took him as a sort of Hobson's choice. It is surprising how catty women can be upon occasion, even supposing—

Well, getting away from generalities, and bringing my theories down to a specific case—I could mention a hundred—there is the peculiar affair of Ora Twetten, one of the Academy teachers, and the dearest girl in the world. She roomed next door to us in the Martha Washington apartments She was a slim, dignified little thing, hedged about with a sort of stiff reserve, yet with an indefinable charm clinging to her like an aureola.

Ora owned to twenty-nine. Why is it that heroines nowadays are so elderly? Still, what else could you expect of a girl who had gone through college and specialized and occupied a chair in English for two years? Nevertheless, Henry is of the opinion that twenty-nine puts a woman clear over the border. That's a man for you. I have no use myself, for the Juliet type of boy-struck heroines.

Be that as it may, I surprised Ora, one day, in tears. I had run up to her room, and found her weeping over a pile of test papers on the Elizabethan period of English literature.

"Do they move you to that extent?" I inquired, laughing.

She dabbed at her eyes with a damp little ball of handkerchief, and broke down.

"I'm so tired of it all," she sobbed. "Teaching and books and bad boys and paper wads. I'd throw up my position any minute just to stir a kettle of mush in my own little kitchen." She sat up straight while a shamed color flamed in her pale cheeks. "You see, I never thought about it till lately. I've been so busy getting my education and teaching. I never had time to think of love; but now—I miss it. When you came in, I was crying because—I believe love has passed me by."

"Nonsense," I assured her. "Peradventure, your prince is even now riding hard. Who knows? Somewhere, someone is waiting for you.

'The poem hangs on the berry bush,
When comes the poet's eye.'

Just keep an eye out for the berry bush."

She picked up a gray, woolen sock and knitted awhile, absently.

"Who is it for?" I teased. "Achilles, you know, had a vulnerable heel."

"For Cousin Leon," she responded, with

a little flush. "The poor fellow writes he gets so chilled in the isolation camp. It seems he was exposed to diptheria and was sent there. I am going to bind this off and get them right off to-night."

"If it were only to some other girl's cousin," I sighed in mock despair. "Think of the possibilities of a note snugly concealed in the toe of a gray sock!"

"In that case," considered Ora, with her usual literal mindedness, "I would have to send the socks first class. I intended to write Leon a letter, and I might slip it in the toe. They'd reach him quicker that way than by parcel post. A brilliant idea, Auntie Miller."

"Keep a weather eye out toward the berry bush," I reminded her as I took my departure.

"But I am no poet," she retorted, shooing me out with the sock.

Over the dezzart—to quote my wash-lady—that evening, I referred casually to Ora and her advancing years.

"Not a chance for her now," grinned Henry, "with fifteen and a half million going a-begging. Men are even now looking toward the harem to adjust this problem," Henry further opined. "Bright prospects and a good time ahead, believe me, Nell, old girl."

"I can't say," said I witheringly, "that the harem idea is exactly a new one with men, though, perhaps, they'll come right out in the open now and maintain them."

"That's the idea," approved Henry, chuckling. "But I can say for our little Jennie wren, that so long as she stays in the teaching profession, she stands a good chance of being a good old maid."

"There are many good things in life besides husbands," I retorted. "As the old mammy said, 'The single life is the happiest of all—once you quit struggling.'"

"'Aye, there's the rub,'" grinned Henry. "They won't quit struggling."

But I felt that Cupid, consummate juggler that he is, had a berry for Ora, on the berry bush, just waiting to be plucked. She was one of those clinging, fluttering sort of women just meant to be shielded and protected. I never saw an oriole but what I thought of Ora Twetten. Her name, "Twetten," had a sort of twittering sound, and her dainty, bird-like movements added to the comparison. Ora was made for mating.

And she looked more bird-like than ever the day that she came over with a letter in her hand. She was all a-flutter and her soft eyes were very bright.

"What do you think of this?" she cried, tossing me the letter. "It seems Cousin Leon didn't get those socks at all. In the allotment, they fell to some one else, and he has returned my note to me with an answer!"

"Many a romance," I stated calmly, "has resulted from a name and address written on an egg shell or tucked in a cracker box. I got a very romantic letter once that way. I have never forgotten its amorous ending: 'Hopping to hear from you soon, I remane,' I could close my eyes and get a very good mental picture of the gentleman hopping. My budding romance was destroyed at one fell blow."

Ora laughed.

"Oh, but this is very different, Auntie Miller. Read it. And I want you to read mine, too. I don't want you to think that I wrote anything that would lead—"

"Oh, you little dissembler, you!" I laughed, opening the little note she had tucked so innocently in the toe of Cousin Leon's gray sock. To no one but a cousin who was more like a brother, would Ora have so bared her heart.

"Dear Cousin:

Here is a pair of socks for you. I have learned to knit because I want to do my bit, too, when our boys are doing so much. With every stitch I have knit in thoughts of you. Perhaps when you are on the long marches, or, if you should go overseas, and should be sitting alone in the trenches thinking of home, it may help you to know that a little girl—alas, such an old girl now, Leon—is sitting at a window looking toward your camp, thinking of you and praying that you may be kept from harm, and may do your duty, come what may."

And this was the other letter written in a bold-faced, masculine hand:

"Dear Little Girl:

I am returning this letter which is plainly

not meant for me. Still, somehow, I see the hand of destiny in it. It dropped at my feet, metaphorically speaking, like a feather from an angel's wing.

Leon Darrow was sent overseas some days ago. In the allotment, the socks, the address having been torn and blurred, fell to me. And what a Godsend! I have no little cousins nor, in fact, anyone to care whether I wear socks or not, so mine are just holding together by a thread. They are more hole-y than righteous. And—I will tell you something else. In a few days I will be out on a furlough, and, just because there is no one to care what becomes of me, I had intended to plunge into wild dissipation—just to forget.

But the thought of a little girl at a window, looking toward the camp, just queered that little adventure. I carried your letter as long as I dared, and read and re-read it. To quote your words, perhaps it may help some in allaying the fact that you are "such an old girl," to know that from now on, a certain lieutenant is going to tread the straight and narrow for the sake of you. And if another feather from an angel's wing should be wafted my way in the shape of a few lines to me direct and not by proxy, I would be transported to the seventh Heaven.

Yours sincerely,

James Poindexter"

Talk of destiny! Why, the finger of fate fairly pointed from every line. It was foreordination, election and predestination rolled into one. But man-like, Henry pooh-poohed at the idea.

"Wait till he sends his photo," he advised dubiously. "Like enough he uses hair oil, curls his mustache and sprinkles Jockey Club on his handkerchief. Our little oriole is playing with fire. Nothing to this matrimonial bureau business. The girl doesn't know when she's well off. She ought to take warning from the divorce courts and be glad she's single. Marriage is a gamble at best."

"And men are gamblers," I observed.

"You are wrong in your deductions," opined Henry. "Women are the gamblers; men are the pawns."

I let it go at that. Argument is useless. Husbands are never on peace terms with their wives. The best we can hope for, as the cynic says, is an armistice.

Well, the days slipped by. Ora blossomed like a flowering almond. At first, she read me the lieutenant's letters, but after a while, she skipped here and there and only read me extracts. Then one day, following the close of the armistice, she ran over, all a-flutter, like the little bird she was.

"Auntie Miller," she cried, "James is leaving Camp Lee! In two weeks he will be enroute to a base hospital at Panama. And he asks that I meet him at St. Louis, and—and—"

"And what?" I inquired calmly and judiciously. I may be unduly suspicious, but I didn't propose to have any hawk get his clutches on this little, fluttering dove.

"And—marry him," she finished, in a shy whisper. "He is one of a unit that has volunteered to go at once. So he can't come away out here after me. Will you go with me, Auntie Miller?"

How could I refuse? Yet a sudden, nameless foreboding swept over me. What manner of man was this whom Ora was going forth to meet? Was he, peradventure a reed shaken by the wind—was he a man unfit to be trusted with a woman's future? My mother used to say that one never knew a man till she married him. What about a man one has never seen? What about his family, his antecedents? I'll confess I had my doubts, but Ora, apparently, did not have a fear. She burnt all her bridges behind her. She resigned her position, and fluttered in and out among millinners, modistes and shops. She was so happy that I hadn't the heart to disabuse her confidence. Once, only, I suggested waiting.

"But why should I wait, Auntie Miller?" she said wearily. "I am so tired of waiting. And I am getting so old. Why should I lose any more of my life's happiness?"

Women are complex beings. Here was Ora looking forward to marriage and I, married, looking backward to love. Yet Henry is a most impeccable husband. I assure you I would not yield him up without a struggle. And Ora, with her chair at the Academy, and her sheltered little

bird cage of a room, was far more independent than she might ever hope to be again, with a "Mrs." tacked onto her name. But—there you are!

At the last moment, Henry decided to go with us.

"I'm going to see this thing through," he declared. "Your Uncle Henry is going to do the giving away act. He is going forth 'as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep—'"

"'Sheep' is right," I interposed tartly.

Ora laughed, and Henry eyed her admiringly.

"This Adonis now," said he ingratiatingly. "How will you recognize him? Will he wear a red carnation in his buttonhole, or the conventional black or what?"

"Oh," fluttered Ora, blushing, "I shall just know him—I can't help but know him—"

"By mental suggestion, maybe," propounded Henry, "or telepathy or eugenic deduction. Ora, be warned in time. How do you know but that he has a mole on his left cheek? How do you know but that he eats peas with a knife? What if he's a widower with unequal mental legs? What if he's bibulous—"

"If he isn't," I broke in calmly, "I should judge that your are. How often have I told you about too many cocktails?"

"What if he's bald?" pursued Henry, enjoying Ora's confusion, "or has outstanding ears, or grows spinach on his chin—"

But Ora, with her fingers in her ears, refused to listen further. I don't think she had the slightest doubt in the world regarding Mr. James Poindexter. But, as the time drew near for our departure, I'll confess to a few qualms. I really don't think I know Henry yet after thirteen years, and here was a man none of us had even seen. To my strait-laced, Puritan notion, it was risky.

I shall never forget the picture Ora made on the morning we left. She wore a taupe suit with a touch of coral at her throat. The coral beads seemed to reflect the glow of her cheeks, and in her brown eyes lay a half-veiled light like the sheen of shimmering silk.

Henry was fairly agape with admiration. The way he bustled about making us comfortable with candy and magazines, was enough to put him in the professional masher class. I have learned to take Henry's susceptibility as a matter of course, as one takes condiments with his dinner. In my opinion there are many things in regard to husbands that may well be winked at, so long as they stop short of actual intrigue.

Arriving at the station, we found that we had a half hour to spare. Henry strolled off uptown while Ora and I pruned our drooping feathers. Finally, we had nothing to do but wait, and the time seemed to drag endlessly. Ora was plainly nervous. As for me, as I watched the shifting crowds, a feeling of foreboding settled upon me like a vise. I looked at Ora. She was watching the door with a fascinated gaze. A girl on the left of me was fidgeting nervously. I noted her too red lips—her face so heavily powdered as to give it the ghastly semblance of a clown's makeup. There was a livid scar on her right temple, ineffectually concealed by the mask of powder. A cheap perfume clung about her that made me faint. I rose and sauntered to a window.

The monotonous drone of the crier was in my ears, announcing the arrival of train No. 15. His train! A stream of passengers was thronging in. I saw Ora start forward with her eyes like stars. And then, just entering the door, I saw him—I felt intuitively that is was he—James Poindexter!

There could be no mistaking that eager, searching glance, that holiday air that stamped him indelibly as a bridegroom. And he was—hopelessly commonplace! You know how women determine such things by one look. He was a soldier it is true, but there was, in his furtive, shifting eyes, his ill-at-ease manner, his coarse features, that which proclaimed him for what he was. After that one look, no one would need to tell me that he wore blue or brown mixture cotton socks. He was as far removed from Ora Twetten as a stone jar from a cloisonne vase or a barnyard fowl from a humming-bird.

In that instant of disillusionment, I seemed to see through the whole scheme of things. How easy to have got an educated soldier to write those letters! I'll confess this sort of thing had not occurred to me. I had pictured a movie Adonis with a Machiavellian eye and checked trousers. But this—this common clod. Instinctively, I started forward to shield Ora from the encounter. But she had seen, too. In that instant, her face shriveled and grew sere, like a leaf deadened by the frost. She wheeled abruptly and came toward me.

"Quick, quick, Auntie Miller!" she gasped. "Let us get out before he sees us! Oh, wasn't he dreadful!"

We hurried out to the platform. I thought the best thing to do would be to avoid a scene and get away. I was put out with Henry for not being back to help us. Fairly dragging Ora, I rounded the platform in time to see train No. 15 snorting away.

Ora shivered.

"I suppose," she said in a tired voice, "there is nothing to do now but go home. I—have been very foolish. I have pursued a will-o-the-wisp But—oh, Auntie Miller, how could he have written such letters? Do you think we could possibly have been mistaken?"

"Has any other party shown up?" I charged. "No, Ora, like many another woman you have been deceived. Men are not to be trusted. I tell you, you've had a narrow escape. Come on, here's a taxi. We'll go back up town and have dinner."

Ora followed me without a word. There, striding toward the taxi, was the gentleman whom I had likened to a barnyard fowl. I whirled Ora out of reach of his baleful eye. Yet, even as I did so, I had a fleeting glimpse of the girl of the scar with the heavily-powdered face. She was being helped into the taxi by Mr. James Poindexter.

"After all," said Ora, with a visible effort to make her voice gay, "it is nothing to get fussed about. I shall go back to the schoolroom and emulate the example of Ella Flagg Young. Think what the world might have lost."

But I scarcely heard. A great light had suddenly burst upon me. What if this were not Mr. James Poindexter? And yet, if not, where was he?

"Stay here a moment," I called, as I dashed pell-mell into the gentlemen's waiting room. A young man in khaki was pacing back and forth uncertainly. His frank, blue eyes were boyishly eager. I rushed up to him excitedly.

"Mr. Poindexter?" I inquired with the bravado born of the exciting events of the past hour.

And, would you believe it, I thought I was going to be embraced. He took one stride forward and grasped my hands.

"You!" he breathed. "Ora! Is it possible—"

Well, really, I put it to you squarely, would you not have been flattered? To be taken at my age—which is a matter that concerns only myself—for an affinity! I assure you it was a most gratifying moment.

"I only wish Henry could see me now!" I gasped, trying to pull away my hands.

"Henry," he repeated blankly, and just then who should come toward us but Henry and Ora.

"Unhand my wife, villain!" thundered Henry.

Mr. Poindexter dropped my hands, and Ora bounded forward with a little cry.

"So you'll try to steal my wife, will you, before my eyes, Jim, you old rascal you!" blustered Henry, and the next thing I knew, I was viewing a series of kaleidoscopic slides that put to shame any Wild West movie I had ever witnessed. Henry and Mr. Poindexter were slapping each other on the back and calling each other "Jim" and "Heinie." Ora was blushing and fluttering in the most adorable, bird-like way, and Mr. Poindexter was gazing into her face as if he would like to take her in his arms and hold her there till time should cease.

"We were on the university team together," explained Henry. "But I never dreamed that Ora's affinity was the same old Jim. Thought of course, by this time, he'd be a benedict like myself—"

"So I will be soon," assured Mr. Poin-

dexter, devouring Ora with his eyes.

"With an olive branch or two," continued Henry wickedly, "though of course, it's never too late to—"

"Henry Miller!" I warned coldly, but my scruples were unnecessary. Ora and Mr. Poindexter were literally dead to the world. I had to ask three times how it was he happened to miss us.

"Why, it was—ah, yes, I should have known you anywhere, Ora—this way," said he absently. "A woman on the train with a baby and several little urchins—yes, I got your dear letter just before I left, Ora—as I was saying, Mrs. Miller, I helped them to a taxi—I feel as if I had known you always—and when I got to the waiting room you were nowhere to be found—if I had lost you, dear!"

"For the love of Mike," exploded Henry disgustedly, "lead the way to the courthouse, Nell, before Jim gets arrested for spooning!"

So we were hurried to a little manse nestling beside a gray stone church with ivy-grown walls, and then, after the ceremony, we had dinner together, with the haunting melody of a Hungarian orchestra seeming to lift us away from commonplaces, into a world of music and love and happiness. Even Henry seemed to be impressed to the extent of squeezing my hand under the table. A wife appreciates such attentions even though she is aware that it doesn't really matter to a man, whose hand he holds.

Our last glimpse of them was from the window of the Pullman. But I think they scarcely saw us, nor heard Henry's parting admonition, "Better late than never." They were hedged about in a little world all their own.

"'The poem hangs on the berry bush,'" I quoted lightly, as we boarded our own car. "Can you deny, Henry, that their union was predestined? Six months ago they did not even know of each other's existence."

"And six months from now," grinned Henry, "they will be sorry that they ever learned of it."

But I will add, for the benefit of those who love the conventional, happy ending, that Henry was mistaken in his premise, if letters from the happy couple can be believed. The last one, in fact, expressed a plaintive regret from Mr. Poindexter, that he had not been plucked earlier from the berry bush. I cannot presume to state why he was not, though Henry caustically avers that he would have been too green to pick any sooner. As for myself, I only go back to my first contention that, sooner or later, what is to be, will be.

IN THE August number: THE GALLOWAY LOOP *by William David Ball.* Three prospectors who have lost their pack, containing $2000 in gold dust, dispute over the division of a strip of bacon. The destiny of the precious strip is determined when one of them proves that he can throw the Golloway Loop with a lasso. Later, the prospect of happiness and prosperity—and more bacon—depends upon the skillful roping of another of the trio.

The Black Cat Club

THE PURPLE STONE OF DAMACHAIN

According to the categories of characterization, action and setting THE PURPLE STONE OF DAMACHAIN is the most finished product of short-story art in the April BLACK CAT. These three structural elements are skillfully blended in the opening paragraph. The first sentence introduces both of the main characters and sketches the setting in three vivid, bold strokes. By the end of the paragraph the action has suggested the theme and revealed the two opposing forces—the contrasted loves of Maire and Michael—which in clash and conflict are to move steadily on to the logically developed climax. Character revealed through action is the ideal of narrative, an ideal admirably realized in this story.

Almost immediately, through the delicate overtone of suggestion, we realize the fatal power that the purple stone is to exercise on the destinies of the youthful pair. There is a coaxing ebb and flow of uncertainty, a recurrent alternation of probabilities that heightens the interest and piques the reader's curiosity. Will Michael give Maire the stone? When at last he does we are prepared for the next question. What will be the outcome of this surrender, its resultant in the final happiness of the lovers? This problematical outcome is the heart of the story's interest. Character and motive are revealed through speech and action; even the setting is drawn by means of what is said and done, thereby avoiding halting the story while we are being told when and where.

The introduction of a rival, the accessory character Nan, not only strengthens the love element but also enables the author, through the conversation of the two women, to heighten the fear that Maire's triumph will prove to be Love's tragedy. Then Michael starts on his dreaded voyage. These two well balanced emotional incidents, warp and woof of the story, give tone and atmosphere by sketching in more of the background and directly further the action and heighten the interest by deepening the mood which deals centrally with the main theme—the ominous threat of the purple stone.

From this point to the climax-denouement the author sustains suspense and plays the reader's hopes against his fears by the skillful employment of suggestion and contrast. Here are some of the finest touches of the story. Speech and action perfectly preserve the essential mood and fundamental characteristic of the grim narrative. Yet the reader's credulity is strained at one crucial point. Did Michael in his wraith appearance—which is manifestly the self projection of Maire's torrent of dread—actually take the purple stone? The reader says alternately yes—and no. Nor does the climax altogether reveal the answer: "Pressed into the palm, the purple stone of Damachain gleamed wanly." Did Maire find it or place it there? If the latter, then the physical necessity is answered by the psychology of the heroine. In this charming uncertainty, however, lies the pathos and the appeal of the story.—*Elliot Field.*

BILLY AND THE BOSS

Upon the first reading, this seems a pleasant little tale with a home-y atmosphere. Every community has a Billie, and we recognize at once, in the story, and take for granted, her composite qualities of loyalty, industry and self-sacrifice.

"The Boss," too, is a familiar type, as much of him as the author will let us see. He is vaguely drawn and one wonders why. The story is written from the viewpoint of Billie, and her feeling for him should not be vague. Else, why the story? However, the author leaves us in doubt. Does Billie return to her former position because she cares for the Boss or because she wants the freedom and liberty of his office?

If she cares, how much does she care? How much does the Boss care, and what position can her offer her? There is a reference to "a certain feminine voice" to whom Billie fibs over the phone. Also, "the Boss's nights off had to be accounted for, though he could seldom account for his lack of cash the next day." These phrases, together with the reference to his "frequent morning-after naps" are vague and disagreeable. Do they refer to a shrewish wife, the cause of too much liquor, or is a darker deduction correct?

The truth is not indecent, but vague hints and allusions are. Billie's brisk and indomitable personality is pictured so truthfully that the reader feels the author has been unkind and unfair to the Boss, who must be really worth while or he would not appeal to Billie. If there is tragedy or sin or sordidness in the Boss's life, bring it in and clean it up. Show us why he is lovable in spite of the mess he has made of things. If marriage between the Boss and Billie is indicated, show us how the man's strength and virility finally come into their own again. Unthinkable that Billie should prop him up forever, and have no strong arm to lean on herself in time of need.

But all this is mere conjecture. The story is irritating because it is not clear and specific, fundamentally.

"His Rigid Highness" is somewhat overdrawn. This part of the story is weak. It is easily conceivable that Billie might have found a lucrative position in a clean and progressive office with an employer fully as congenial as the Boss, and still have gone back to the dingy printing office, gladly.

—*Mrs. Mauritz E. Petersen*

THE TRAMP

When we read about a tramp who wears a celluloid collar, and whose shoes are shined, we feel like remarking that we come from Missouri. But when we read further that the tramp carries about with him a book of philosophical maxims, and reads it, we just want to cry out, "Don't believe it."

Of course there may actually have been such a character as Sunshine Harry, but to put him into a story, and to make him seem real, is a hard task, and one which has not been accomplished in THE TRAMP. Everybody has some notion of what a tramp is, and it is hard to reconcile that preconceived opinion with Sunshine Harry, when he pulls out his book, and reads verse aloud to the farmer who has just taken his breakfast from him.

It is not necessary to the story that Sunshine Harry should do this. In fact, it would be better if he did not. It is all very well for him to get the better of Cyrus Townsend, intellectually, but we should feel more sympathy for him if he did not have so ready a come-back, and had to bear the injustice in silence. All through the story Sunshine Harry has too facile a gift of expression; when he describes his dream-girls to Daisy, he might be a student in a literary class; and the prayer, "All-seeing Father, I entreat Thee, be Thou my shepherd," etc. comes rather from the pulpit than from the lips of a tramp swimming in a muddy stream. How much more effective it would be if he just muttered, "God, help me!"

Strip Harry, therefore, of his book of philosophy, of his too easily flowing eloquence! Strip him of his collar, and forget the shine on his shoes! He should be a more human tramp, in tatters and rags; his philosophical spirit should lurk within him, showing itself only occasionally, in half-expressed thoughts. As the story is written he is too obvious. We are battered on the head with the information that Harry is an unusual tramp, instead of letting it seep in, from occasional hints, flashes here and there of the intelligent spirit inside the tramp. If Harry were more like the conventional tramp, outwardly, his real character could be more convincingly shown.

Daisy is on the whole very well done. We feel that she is a real little girl. But her long speech in defence of Harry, at the end of the story, is unreal. No child, short of a prodigy, could deliver so long and coherent a speech, in front of a crowded court.

The story itself is, for the most part, well told. However, there is no need to make such a fuss about the appearance of Daisy in the court room. Leave out the description of the storm outside, and the branches knocking against the windows. It would be just as effective simply to have Daisy appear at the door.

—*H. L. Deimel, Jr.*

JOANNA AND MOTHER G.

JOANNA AND MOTHER G. is like a whiff of fresh outdoor air. It leads one into the silence and liberty of nature where man's social conventions shrink away ashamed and belittled. It gives nature the right of way. Its descriptions of nature are poetical and well done, not overdone. They ornament the narrative instead of clogging it.

The story is a palpable attack on prudishness and conventionalities. Its tone is decidedly Bohemian. It is shown rather cleverly that Joanna had turned Jimmy down two years before the story opens, that she was now in a mood of half-repentance, and was viewing life from a new angle.

There is something semi-sensual in the kissing episode at the end; and all the way through one feels that the author is skating on thin ice above a risque subject. But this adds rather than detracts from the interest and attraction of the story. There's a pleasurable thrill in skating over thin ice when one is young and red blooded. Moreover, the proprieties are really observed and quite a degree of humor created out of the effect.

In making it necessary for Joanna to stay all night at the cabin, the author is a bit clumsy. The blistered heel and the non appearance of the Eadses are natural enough, but there is visible stage carpentry in having the store closed and having Joanna miss the last car.

There is both humor and human nature in the appeal of that bacon to a tired and hungry woman. Her smoking the cigarette does not improve her as a heroine, but it certainly shows her change of front, and the act might be construed by Jimmy as if she had said in so many words:

"Jimmy, I smoke cigarettes now. I'm a different girl than I was two years ago. I refused to marry you then. Try me now."

It is no wonder that Jimmy, after seeing her puffing away on her cigarette, said, "Holy smoke!"—*W. A. Williams*

IN THE NEXT ROOM

This is a wholesome story with an apt title and a meaning as definite as Maeterlinck's "Bluebird." If, as we are told, the purpose of fiction is to interpret human life, here is a page out of the old Human Nature's book embodying in concrete form a specific experience glimpsing truth about the pursuit of happiness. Happiness is an elusive goddess to worship in the abstract, yet there is a metaphysical period in the growth and development of every thinking individual when solitude, or at least surcease from the endless jangling of materialism, is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and one can conscientiously sympathize with this generous, growing boy in his endeavor to break away from the "madding crowd" and give himself over to the contemplation of the boundless mysteries of the abstract. Of course, there will always be some who will refuse to take a young man seriously when he declares his intention to desist from "sporting a new car every season," and will tap their foreheads when he mentions "the purpose of life" and exhibits a tendency to discuss philosophy; but that does not prove that such an attitude of mind is not a perfectly human experience. Nevertheless, in spite of Stanley's almost savage determination, the "material world managed to break in upon him" under the guise of the "subtle cunning of casual events," and when the girl with the lobelia-blue eyes rapped on his door, then the plot began to unroll.

The important element in this story is the mood—a phase of character—and when one considers the seriousness with which Stanley regarded himself, the incident of the upkeep is accepted as a natural outburst on his part, and free from any insinuation or suggestion that it might entail the slightest obligation on her part in the way of social intimacy. This is a high light in the story and a master stroke in character delination.... The suspense during Stanley's restlessness while the conspirators assailed him from every angle is cleverly handled,, and the climax logical as it is satisfying when Stanley suddenly realized that Love—the enfolder—embraced all that was best in his world of philosophy.—*J. J. Leary*

Editor's note: Do not try to criticise every story in this number. Put your energy into one sane, carefully written criticism. Make it a finished essay, not merely a synopsis, and do not write more than five hundred words. Write on one side of the paper only. The number of words in the criticism should be written at the top of the first sheet, together with the name and address of the author. Criticisms of stories in this number should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later that August 10.

The "OPEN DOOR" For WRITERS

The very authors whose stories are most in demand by magazine editors to-day started their careers by writing stories for the BLACK CAT. Among them are Rupert Hughes, Alice Hegan Rice, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbor Thompkins, Ellis Parker Butler, Susan Glaspell, and, to mention some of the more recent arrivals among the top-notchers, James Francis Dwyer, Ida M. Evans, Hapsburg Liebe, William Hamilton Osborne, William J. Neidig, and Octavus Roy Cohen.

There are new writers coming forward every day, and the BLACK CAT believes in being near the source of supply, in being almost *the* source of supply. It is always ready to publish the work of those who show promise, bases its judgment on merit alone, and gives the same consideration to the new writer that is given to the writer with an established reputation.

There is no better way to learn to write than by analyzing the work of other writers. Thus, it was to help the aspiring writer to a quicker understanding of short-story principles that the BLACK CAT CLUB was formed and made a regular feature of the magazine. The idea of the CLUB is simple: It offers the writer an opportunity to master technique by study and criticism of BLACK CAT stories. These criticisms are the writer's "finger exercises." Each month the best critical essays are published, with the names of the authors, *and paid for at the rate of one cent per word.* Membership is open to all who subscribe to the magazine. Several members have had stories published in the BLACK CAT and other magazines since joining the CLUB. By studying stories that *have sold* you may learn to write stories that *will sell.*

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SIDNEY A. WELTMER, Pres.

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The International New Thought Alliance, General Headquarters
Washington, D. C., Nov. 14, 1916.
CHAS. F. HAANEL., St. Louis, Mo.
My Dear Mr. Haanel:
I have read your little booklet, "The Master-Key," carefully, and think it very good indeed. I am enclosing stamps for a few more copies, which I wish to give to those whom I know to need just the dynamic message which your book contains. Yours sincerely,
GRACE WILSON, Sec.

Unity School of Christianity
Kansas City, Mo., Dec. 14, 1916.
Dear Mr. Haanel:
Your little book, entitled "Master-Key," is a very practical presentation of the power of mind in its various fields of action. It conveys to one the conviction that Mind is All Powerful and All Present.
Faithfully,
CHARLES FILLMORE, Pres.

The Day Star Publishing Co.
Topeka, Kansas, Feb. 15, 1917.
"The Master-Key" is the answer to the demand "knock and it shall be opened," and truly it will open the "Gate Beautiful" leading into every "temple of the living God." All the world seek this marvelous key. Oh ye who sit in darkness "Knock"—use this "Master-Key" and the door shall be opened unto you, revealing to your eyes of flesh, peace, power and plenty.
LIDA HALLIE HARDY, Pres.

Washington, D. C., Nov. 21, 1916.
I have just received and read your booklet called "The Master-Key." It is exceedingly thoughtful and in many ways masterful. I thank you for the privilege of reading it and will file it away with my strong presentations of the philosophy of life. I am truly yours,
GRANVILLE LOWTHER.

FREE! There is no charge for the Master Key. It is FREE

Charles F. Haanel,
429 Granite Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.
Send me a copy of the Master-Key FREE!
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Address.....
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NOTE—There is a Master Key for every reader of The Black Cat. Be sure you get yours!